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Peach and blueberry crisp with spiced-pecan topping, p. 72

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Learn which steaks to buy and how to cook them

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Cover photo and photos on these pages: Scott Phillips

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Photos: Scott Phillips

in season

Sweet on Onions

BY RUTH LIVELY

What makes a sweet onion so sweet? It's not necessarily more sugar, although some sweet onions do have a high sugar content. The main reason sweet onions taste so much sweeter than other onions is that they are low in sulfur compounds, especially pyruvic acid, which gives regular, or storage, onions their pungency. It's pyruvic acid that accounts for the bite in the mouth, the tear in the eye, and for some, the pain in the stomach after eating raw onions. Because they're milder, sweet onions are a great choice for eating raw, and they cause less tearing, so you can chop away without donning swim goggles.

Sweet onions go by many names—Vidalias, Mauis, Walla Wallas, OsoSweets, Texas Sweets—but they all have one thing in common: They are grown in a region where the soil is low in sulfur. They all tend to be large, although they vary in shape from round to flattened.

When to find them

Sweet onions are traditionally a spring and summer crop. However, new varieties, new sources in the southern hemisphere, and improved storage capability have filled in the gap, so now we have some kind of sweet onion available much of the year. (See the sidebar, below left).

How to choose and store them

Sweet onions are fragile, with tissue-thin skins, and full of juice, so treat them gently. They won't keep for months, as do storage onions. Buy firm bulbs with no soft spots, bruises, or other signs of damage. The necks should be tightly closed. If you plan to use them within a week or so, you can leave them out on the counter. For longer storage, put them in a cool place, protected from light; an open brown paper bag works well. If space is tight, hang them in the basement knotted one by one in the leg of a pair of pantyhose—you don't want them to touch. You can also store them loose in the fridge's crisper drawer, on top of a piece of newspaper, to keep them dry. Just don't store them in a plastic bag; their juiciness makes them prone to mold.

What to do with them

Sweet onions cook quickly, thanks to all those juices, but their lack of pungency means they're not well suited to be used as an aromatic in place of regular onions. Instead, use them raw or where onion is the main ingredient, so their mildness can shine. Seasonings that complement the sweetness include salt and pepper; warm spices like nutmeg, cumin, paprika, and hot pepper; herbs like thyme, sage, rosemary, and oregano; aromatics like capers, olives, and anchovies; and vinegar to play counterpoint.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Sweet onions in season

Vidalia and South American sweet onions enjoy wide distribution in season. Other types have a more limited distribution, but most can be special-ordered if you don't live near the region of production. (For sources, visit Sweetonionsource.com.) California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Michigan have areas where sweet onions are grown. The most popular sweet onions are available as follows:

Maui: In season May through December. Smaller than other sweets.

OsoSweet: From South America. Available January through March. Very high in sugars.

Texas Sweet: Two kinds: Spring Sweets and Texas 1015 Super-Sweets (the number refers to the optimal planting date, October 15). Available March through June.

Vidalia: In season April through June but available into the fall.

Walla Walla: Available June to August.

Balsamic-Glazed Grilled Sweet Onions

Yields 1½ cups.

Sweet, smoky, tangy, and herbal—a lot of flavors come together in this rustic dish. These onions are fabulous with grilled chops or steaks or tucked among sliced tomatoes for a summer salad platter. Or chop them roughly and spoon onto grilled bread rubbed with a cut ripe tomato for a twist on bruschetta.

2 lb. sweet onions (such as Vidalia, Walla Walla, Maui, or Texas Sweet)
Olive oil for grilling
1 cup balsamic vinegar
1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme leaves
½ tsp. crushed pink peppercorns (optional)
½ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste

Peel and trim the onions. Cut them crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices. Insert a toothpick or poultry lacer horizontally halfway into each slice to hold the onion rings together.

Prepare a medium-low charcoal fire or heat a gas grill on medium low for 10 minutes. Brush the grill grate clean and wipe it with a paper towel dipped in oil. Brush both sides of the onion slices with olive oil and grill, covered, turning every 10 minutes, until very soft and well browned on the outside, 35 to 40 minutes total. (A little blackening is OK, but try not to char the onions.) Stack the onions on a large sheet of foil and wrap loosely. Set aside while you make the glaze.

Pour the balsamic vinegar into a small saucepan and add the thyme leaves, pink peppercorns (if using), and salt. Boil, uncovered, over medium-high heat until the vinegar has reduced to about ¼ cup and has a syrupy texture, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool briefly and season to taste with salt, if necessary.

Transfer the onions to a dish. Remove the toothpicks and any extremely charred layers, if necessary. If the balsamic glaze has thickened, reheat it gently until pourable. Pour the glaze over the onions and brush to distribute it evenly. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Note: You can grill the onions and make the glaze several hours ahead, but wait to glaze the onions until just before serving. If the onions sit in the glaze for more than 10 minutes, their juices will thin the glaze.

Tasty ideas for raw sweet onions

Raita is a cooling condiment that's delicious with grilled meats and fish, roasted vegetables, or plain rice. Marinate chopped sweet onions in rice vinegar for half an hour, drain, and stir into plain yogurt with lots of minced herbs (basil, mint, dill, chives, cilantro, or a combination).

A salad with orange slices plays up the sweet side of onions. Vary the dressing and additional pairings to suit your menu. Add jicama and avocado and dress with a lime-cilantro vinaigrette. Combine with sliced cucumber and dress with a sesame-soy-ginger vinaigrette. Or toss in a cumin-spiked vinaigrette and serve over butter lettuce or spinach, garnished with mint.

A zesty salsa cruda is good with tacos, grilled fish, or grilled meat. Combine diced sweet onion, avocado, ripe tomatoes, and red pepper with olive oil. Season well with salt and pepper and a little cumin. Add a liberal handful of chopped cilantro and squeeze in some lime juice. Stir gently and let sit for an hour or so to let the flavors meld.

Onion sandwiches are for true onion lovers. Spread mayonnaise on one slice of dark bread, sharp mustard on another. Cover the mayo with a thin slice of onion and the mustard with slices of sharp cheese. Or spread two pieces of white bread generously with mayo mixed with chopped parsley and basil and a dash of hot sauce. Add a slice of sweet onion and a fat slice of ripe tomato seasoned with salt and pepper. Eat this one standing over the kitchen sink.

More ways to cook sweet onions

Onion confit is great as a condiment for meats, a stuffing in a rolled roast, a pizza topping, or a savory tart filling. Slowly cook sliced sweet onions in a little olive oil until meltingly tender and caramelized, stirring from time to time. Finish with a splash of good-quality vinegar (sherry, red-wine, or balsamic).

Roasted onion slices are a delicious side dish on their own, but they're a versatile ingredient in sandwiches, pizza, focaccia, and salads, too. Roast thick slices, well seasoned and oiled, until lightly browned. Finish with a dash of vinegar.

Onion rings need no explanation. Slice sweet onions ½ to ¾ inch thick and separate into rings. Dip into a batter of flour and beer and deep-fry until golden. Sprinkle with salt and enjoy warm.

Ruth Lively divides her time between Connecticut and the Languedoc region of France. ◆

Fine Cooking

Guide to Great Steaks for the Grill

TEXT BY SARAH JAY

What says summer better than a thick, juicy steak sizzling over a fire? For entertaining, grilling steaks sets a relaxed mood yet makes your guests feel special. And on weeknights, a simply grilled steak is a quick route to a treat-yourself-right supper. But which cut to buy? And how to grill it? Not to worry. From shopping tips to judging doneness, this guide will teach you how to grill mouthwatering steaks every time.

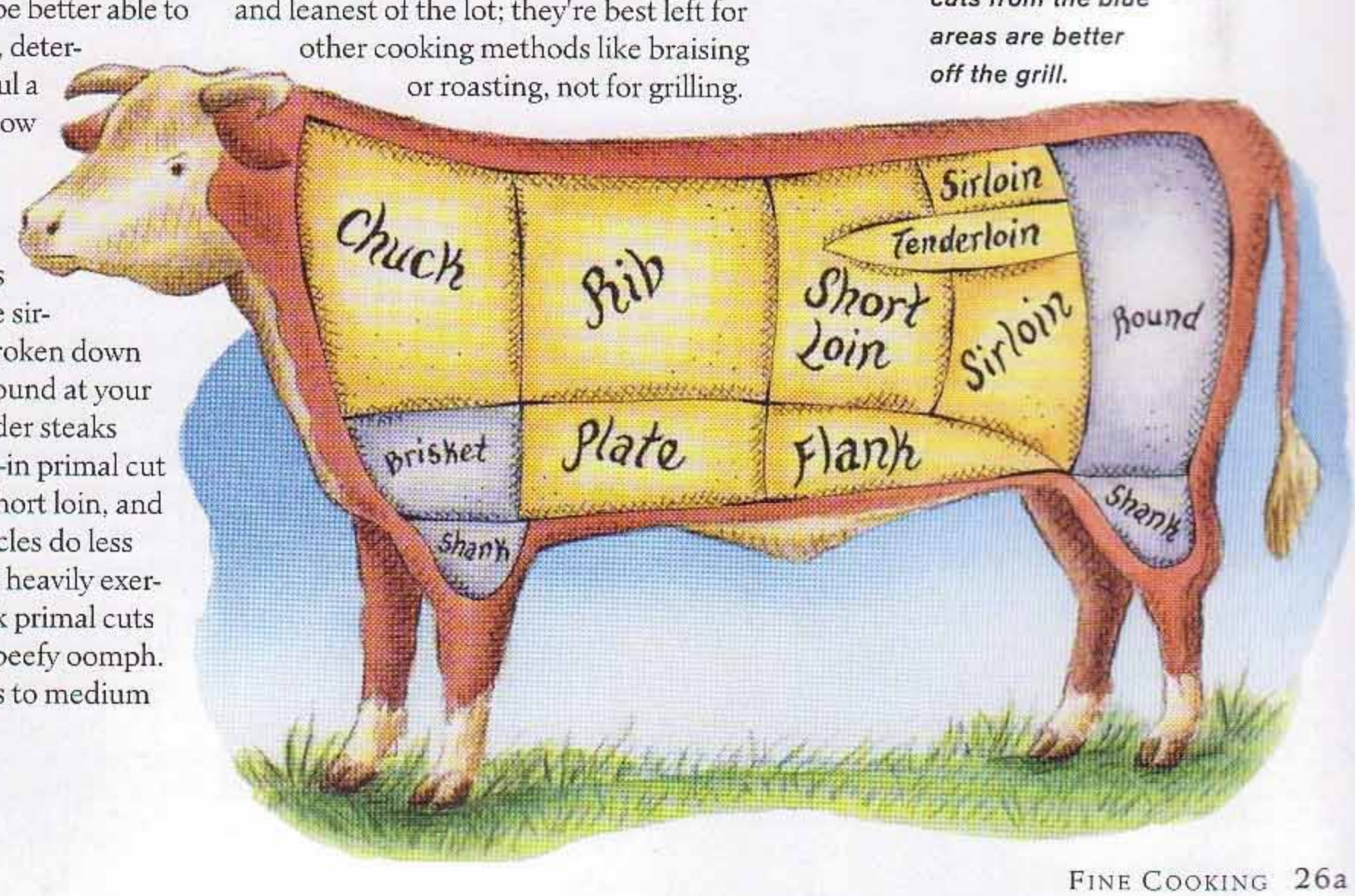
Choosing your cut

Anatomy of a steer

Beef labels can be confusing. The name of the cut can vary from one market—and region—to the next (see the chart inside). But if you understand where the "primal cuts" come from on a steer, you'll be better able to decipher supermarket labels, determine how tender and flavorful a steak might be, and decide how to cook a particular cut.

Wholesalers break down steer carcasses into nine sections, or primal cuts (the tenderloin is part of the sirloin). These cuts are then broken down further into the retail cuts found at your supermarket. The most tender steaks come from the cow's back—in primal cut terminology, from the rib, short loin, and sirloin—because these muscles do less work. Steaks from the more heavily exercised chuck, plate, and flank primal cuts are tougher but have more beefy oomph. When you cook these steaks to medium rare or medium and slice them thinly across the grain, they're great for the grill and easy on your wallet, too. Cuts from the brisket, shank, and round are the toughest and leanest of the lot; they're best left for other cooking methods like braising or roasting, not for grilling.

Steaks from the yellow sections are good for grilling; cuts from the blue areas are better off the grill.



Understanding labels

As the demand for safer, sustainably raised beef grows, we're seeing more language relating to farming and production methods—or how the animal was raised—on beef packages. That's the good news. The bad news is that some of these terms have loose standards and are not verified by anyone other than the producer. (If the beef in your market doesn't carry any of these terms, tell the meat manager you'd like to see more options.)

Grass-fed All cattle eat a natural diet of grass at the beginning of their lives. The question is whether the animal was switched to grain to fatten up before slaughter, or whether it continued to eat grass and hay throughout its life. From a health standpoint, exclusively grass-fed beef has more nutrients and less saturated fat, lower rates of the dangerous *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria, and no risk of mad cow disease. From a flavor perspective, it's leaner than conventional beef, and it's less forgiving if overcooked; aim for rare or medium rare.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grass-fed standards (look for the "process verified" shield on beef packages) specify a grass-only diet as well as continuous access to pasture during the growing season. However, there is no restriction on the use of antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides, and the program is voluntary, which means a producer may use "grass-fed" on its labels without verification. Look for terms like "100% grass-fed" or "grass-finished" or for another third-party verifier, such as the American Grassfed Association (whose standards are stricter than those of the USDA).

Free-range or free-roaming These terms have no legal definition when applied to beef (though they do for poultry). While they suggest, at minimum, that the animal had access to the outdoors, there are no standards that producers need to follow.

Organic Beef that carries the USDA organic logo has met the department's standards, which prohibit the use of growth hormones, antibiotics, genetically modified feed, and animal byproducts, among other things. The standards do not require a grass-only diet; the animal may be fed organic grain.

Raised without antibiotics This implies just what it says: that antibiotics were not given to the cows. The producer must submit documentation supporting the claim, but unless otherwise noted, it isn't independently verified.

No hormones administered This suggests that the animal received no growth-stimulating hormones. The producer must submit documentation supporting the claim, but unless otherwise noted, it isn't third-party verified.

Natural As defined by the USDA, "natural" or "all-natural" beef has been minimally processed and contains no preservatives or artificial ingredients. Since virtually all fresh beef conforms to these standards, the term has no real significance.

Naturally raised The USDA is working on a new standard for naturally raised beef that would prohibit the use of hormones, antibiotics, and animal byproducts but might not address other production concerns, such as animal welfare, diet, or access to pasture. Once the final standard is released, you may start to see this term accompanied by the USDA "process verified" shield. However, the program will be voluntary, so producers may use the term even without verification.

The grading system

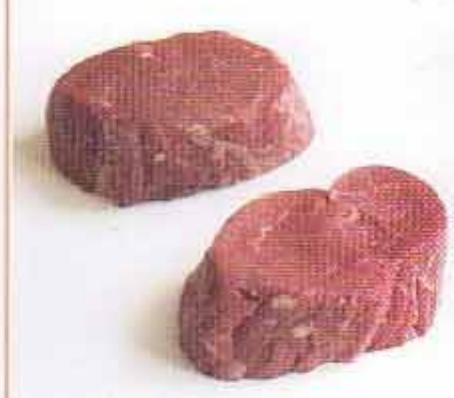
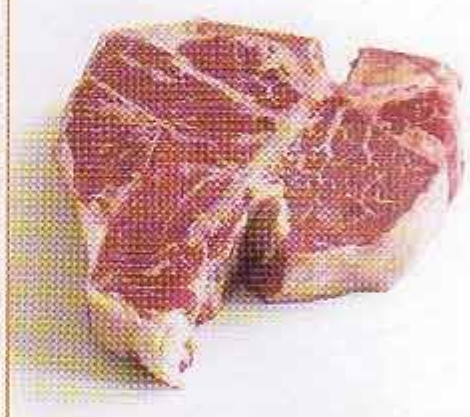
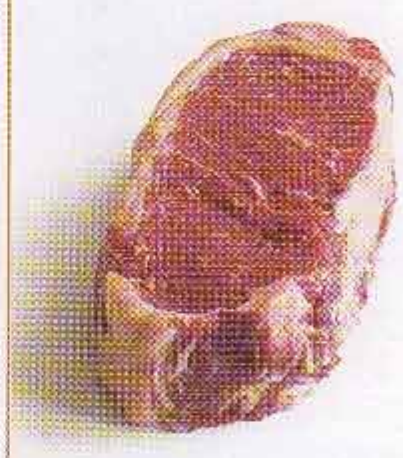
The USDA evaluates beef quality based on how much marbling (flecks of intramuscular fat) is present, along with other qualities, such as age, that correlate to tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. Not all beef is graded, so look for the USDA grading shield to know what you're buying.

Prime beef is tops. It has abundant marbling and cooks up beautifully. Only 2% to 3% of all beef is labeled prime. If you're willing to pay a premium, you can buy prime beef online or at high-end butcher shops. Go to Where to Buy It, on p. 82, for more information.

Choice comes next and is also very high quality, with good marbling. It's often available in supermarkets, but there is wide variability within this grade. Ask the butcher to guide you to the best steaks on offer.

Select is the third grade. It's leaner and has very little marbling, so it won't be as juicy or tender when cooked, especially if cooked beyond medium rare.

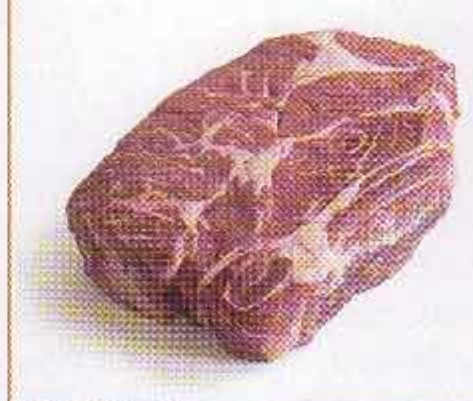
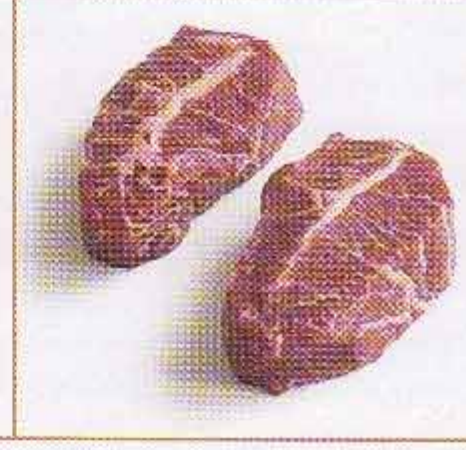
Know your steaks

Cut, alternative names	What it looks like	Description	Cost	Cooking tips
FROM THE SHORT LOIN (back)				
Tenderloin steak filet steak, filet mignon, tournedos, filet de boeuf		These very tender special-occasion steaks are cut from the long, narrow tenderloin muscle. When cut from the smaller end, they're usually 1 to 2 inches thick and 1½ to 2 inches in diameter and called filet mignon. Tournedos are cut from the wider end and are thinner and larger. Figure one steak per person.	$$$$	Good match for rubs, sauces, or flavored butters.
T-bone		A carnivore's delight, this steak consists of two muscles separated by a T-shaped bone. Cut from the front end of the short loin, the larger muscle is the juicy, flavorful top loin, and the smaller muscle is part of the tenderloin. Look for ample marbling. Steaks will weigh 1½ to 2 lb. and serve 3 to 4.	$$$	Excellent with rubs, sauces, or flavored butters.
Porterhouse		Essentially the same as a T-bone except that it has a larger tenderloin muscle and a smaller top loin muscle than the T-bone (it's cut from the rear of the short loin, where the tenderloin is bigger). Ample marbling. Magnificent when cut to a luxuriously thick 2 inches, which can weigh 2 lb. and serve 3 to 4.	$$$	The tenderloin muscle cooks quickly, so keep it over lower heat. To carve, cut the two muscles off the bone, slice, and then reassemble so everyone can sample from both sides.
Top loin steak **Boneless:** strip steak, Kansas City steak, New York strip steak, ambassador steak, veiny steak, hotel steak, boneless club, and more **Bone-in:** New York strip loin, shell steak, strip steak, club steak, club sirloin steak, Delmonico steak		Think of these popular steaks as a T-bone or porterhouse with the tenderloin section removed, leaving you with the very tender and juicy top loin muscle. May be bone-in or boneless (shown). Look for ample marbling. Ideal thickness is 1½ inches, giving you a ¾- to 1-lb. steak serving 2 to 3.	$$$	Firm enough to take a marinade but also great with sauces or flavored butters.

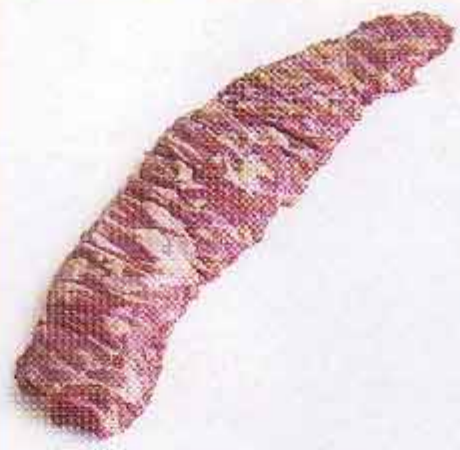
The names of retail cuts vary from one meat counter to the next. Furthermore, some names can apply to two very different cuts. When in doubt, ask the butcher.

Chart continues inside.

Know your steaks *(continued)*

Cut, alternative names	What it looks like	Description	Cost	Cooking tips
FROM THE RIB				
Rib-eye & rib steak **Boneless:** Spencer steak, Delmonico steak, beauty steak, entrecote, market steak **Bone-in:** rib steak		May be boneless (shown) or bone-in. Ask for cuts from the small end of the rib (closer to the short loin), where the tender eye muscle is larger, rather than from the large end (near the chuck), where there are tougher shoulder muscles. Should have ample marbling. Exceptionally tender and juicy. Ideal thickness is at least 1½ inches, serving 2 to 3.	$$$	Excellent when paired with a dry rub, marinade, or sauce.
FROM THE SIRLOIN (hip)				
Top sirloin sirloin butt steak, London broil, top sirloin butt, center cut		The sirloin consists of several muscles, and steaks cut from this area, while flavorful, vary in tenderness and marbling. Top sirloin is the most desirable (those labeled simply "sirloin" are tougher). Look for steaks at least 1½ inches thick, serving 2 to 3.	$$	Marinades and rubs can help counter the steak's leanness. To carve, slice thinly or portion into smaller individual steaks.
Tri-tip steak culotte, triangle steak, triangle tip, Newport steaks, sirloin bottom butt		Cut from the triangle-shaped tri-tip muscle in the slightly tougher bottom sirloin area, these small, lean steaks are prized for their great beefy flavor. Tri-tips can come in packages of 2 or 3 and are typically 1 to 1¼ inches thick. Figure one steak per person.	$$	Excellent with spice rubs and marinades; slice thinly across the grain.
FROM THE CHUCK (shoulder)				
Chuck-eye steak boneless chuck fillet steak, boneless steak, bottom chuck, center-cut chuck steak		This boneless steak, found under the steer's back bone closest to the rib section, has good beefy flavor and is relatively tender, though it may also have a fair amount of fat and gristle. Steaks can weigh from 1¼ to 2½ lb. and serve 2 to 4.	$	Good choice for marinades; slice very thinly.
Top blade steak flatiron steak, lifter steak, book steak, petite steak, top chuck steak, butler steak, chicken steak		A flavorful steak from the chuck, this cut is quite tender yet moderately priced, making it an excellent value. Figure one 1¼- to 1½-inch-thick steak per person.	$	Highly recommended for marinades; remove the line of gristle running down the middle either before or after cooking; slice very thinly.

Photos: Scott Phillips; illustration, Jennifer Thermes

Cut, alternative names	What it looks like	Description	Cost	Cooking tips
FROM THE FLANK & PLATE (underbelly)				
Flank steak London broil, jiffy steak, flank steak filet		From the underbelly of the steer, flank is a lean cut with a visible longitudinal grain that absorbs marinades well. It's known for its beefy flavor and firm texture. Oblong in shape with a thinner, tapered end. One steak weighs 1 to 2 lb., serving 3 to 4.	$$	Superb with marinades. Slice thinly on the bias (and across the grain) to increase tenderness. Keep thinner end over less-intense heat and flip occasionally for even cooking.
Hanger steak hanging tenderloin, flap meat, butcher's steak, butcher's tenderloin		This cut "hangs" from the last rib just below the tenderloin. It's not often found in supermarkets (there's only one per steer, and butchers like to keep it for themselves), but this flavorful, tender, and juicy cut is worth seeking out. A 1½- to 2-lb. hanger steak will feed 3 to 4.	$$	Good for marinating. Ask for the central nerve to be removed, which will result in two smaller steaks, or grill whole and cut around the nerve during carving. Grill briefly over high heat and avoid cooking beyond medium rare. Slice across the grain.
Skirt steak Philadelphia steak, fajitas meat		From the plate, this distinctive looking steak is the long, thin diaphragm muscle. It has a fairly coarse grain, which runs crosswise rather than lengthwise (as with flank steak). Though it's sometimes confused with flank, it's fattier, more tender, and offers even more beefy flavor. 1½ to 2 lb. of skirt steak will feed 3 to 4.	$$	Ideal for marinades. Grill quickly over high heat, just a few minutes per side. Keep to medium rare to avoid drying out. Carve across the grain, lengthwise.

Watch the clock, but be flexible

Thickness of steak	Total grilling time, high heat	Total grilling time, medium-high heat
½ inch	3 to 4 min. for medium rare; 4 to 5 min. for medium	4 to 5 min. for medium rare; 5 to 6 min. for medium
1 inch	6 to 7 min. for medium rare; 7 to 8 min. for medium	8 to 9 min. for medium rare; 9 to 10 min. for medium
1½ inches	10 to 12 min. for medium rare; 12 to 14 min. for medium	11 to 13 min. for medium rare; 13 to 15 min. for medium
2 inches	n/a (steak will burn before it's cooked through)	18 to 22 min. for medium rare; 22 to 24 min. for medium

Keep in mind that lean steaks don't have as much buffer against overcooking and that the second side always cooks faster than the first.

Flavor boosters

Marinades

Method: Whisk all ingredients in a small bowl. If there is sugar in the marinade, make sure it's dissolved. Combine the marinade and meat and refrigerate, turning occasionally. Marinate steaks, depending on their thickness, at least 1 hour and up to 12 hours. Pat the meat dry before grilling.

Balsamic & Herb Marinade

Yields a scant 1 cup, enough for 1½ to 2 lb. meat.

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
1½ Tbs. roasted garlic purée (or 1 Tbs. minced fresh garlic)
1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary
1 Tbs. chopped fresh sage or fresh oregano

Bourbon & Brown Sugar Marinade

Yields about 1 cup, enough for 1½ to 2 lb. meat.

½ cup soy sauce
⅓ cup bourbon or other whiskey
⅓ cup firmly packed brown sugar, preferably dark
1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. hot sauce, such as Tabasco

Soy, Ginger & Garlic Marinade

Yields about 1 cup, enough for 1½ to 2 lb. meat.

6 Tbs. soy sauce
¼ cup sugar
8 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
10 scallions (white part only), finely minced (about 2 Tbs.)
4 tsp. sake or rice wine
4 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger
4 tsp. Asian sesame oil

Bourbon & Brown Sugar Marinated Flank Steak

Spice & Herb Rubs

Method: Combine all ingredients in a small bowl. Apply rubs just before grilling, or for more flavor, rub the mix into the meat and refrigerate for several hours before grilling. You can store dry spice rubs in the pantry for 2 to 3 weeks. Store rubs with fresh ingredients in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.

Tex-Mex Rub

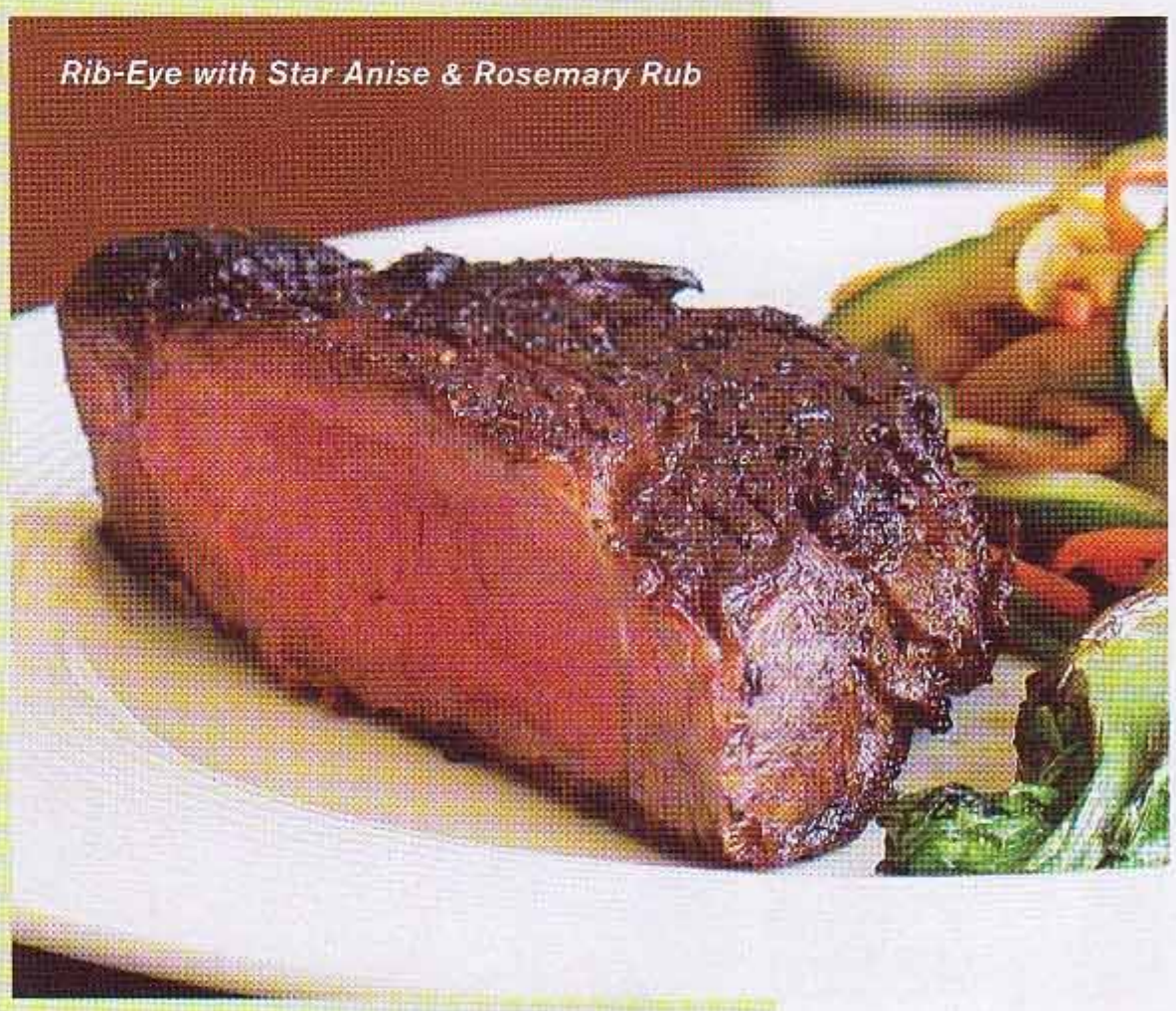
Yields about ¼ cup, enough for 1½ to 2 lb. meat.

2 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 Tbs. cumin seeds, toasted and ground
1 Tbs. minced garlic
1 Tbs. chopped fresh oregano
1½ tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. chili powder
¼ tsp. cayenne

Middle Eastern Steak Rub

Yields ½ cup, enough for 1½ to 2 lb. meat.

3 Tbs. Aleppo pepper or 2 Tbs. Hungarian hot paprika
2 Tbs. ground coriander
1 Tbs. ground cumin
2 tsp. dried mint
1 tsp. olive oil
½ tsp. ground nutmeg
½ tsp. ground allspice (or ¼ tsp. each ground cloves and ground cinnamon)



Rib-Eye with Star Anise & Rosemary Rub

Star Anise & Rosemary Rub

Yields 2½ Tbs., enough for 1½ to 2 lb. meat.

1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary
2 tsp. kosher salt
2 tsp. olive oil
1 tsp. ground star anise or ½ tsp. five-spice powder
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Flavored Butters

Method: Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl. Use immediately or use plastic wrap to shape the butter into a log, tightening the ends as if it were a sausage. The butters will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks or in the freezer for a month.

Roquefort Butter

Yields about 3/4 cup, enough for 12 steaks.

1 shallot, thinly sliced
1 small clove garlic, minced
½ cup (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 oz. Roquefort cheese, crumbled
½ Tbs. red-wine vinegar
½ tsp. fresh thyme
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Note: Cook the shallot and garlic in 1 Tbs. of the butter in a small skillet over medium heat until soft; let cool. Combine with the remaining ingredients.

Lime-Cilantro Butter

Yields about ½ cup, enough for 8 steaks.

½ cup (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh cilantro
2 tsp. finely grated lime zest
1 tsp. green Tabasco or other jalapeño hot sauce
Kosher salt to taste

Basil Butter

Yields about ½ cup, enough for 8 steaks.

½ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup finely chopped fresh basil
1 tsp. minced garlic
½ tsp. finely grated lemon zest
Kosher salt and ground white pepper to taste

Basil Butter

Flank Steak with Chunky Tomato-Basil Vinaigrette

Sauces & Salsas

Chunky Tomato-Basil Vinaigrette

Yields a generous 2 cups.

1¼ to 1½ lb. fresh ripe plum tomatoes, seeded and cut into ½-inch dice (2 cups)
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
⅓ cup red-wine vinegar
1 large or 2 medium shallots, thinly sliced
¼ cup lightly packed chopped fresh basil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Toss all the ingredients in a medium bowl.

Ancho Chile Harissa

Yields 1 cup.

5 ancho chiles, seeded, stemmed, soaked in hot water until soft (about 1 hour), and drained
⅓ cup olive oil
3 cloves garlic, chopped
2 Tbs. cold water
2 tsp. soy sauce
2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. ground coriander
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Combine all the ingredients in a food processor and purée until very smooth.

Pesto-Style Salsa Verde

Yields 1 cup.

1 cup packed fresh flat-leaf parsley, blanched in boiling salted water, cooled, and squeezed dry
½ cup packed fresh basil, blanched in boiling salted water, cooled, and squeezed dry
½ cup packed fresh cilantro
¼ cup toasted blanched almonds
2 medium cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
¼ tsp. dried red chile flakes
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. white-wine vinegar

Mix all ingredients except the oil and vinegar in a food processor. With the processor running, slowing pour the olive oil into the feed tube and blend until the mixture becomes a thick purée. Stir in the vinegar just before serving.

Ancho Chile Harissa

Take it to the grill

Grilling done right

Create a two-level fire with areas of higher and lower heat. Then you can move the steaks to a cooler spot if they're cooking too quickly or if there are flare-ups.

To judge the heat of your fire, hold your outstretched hand 1 to 2 inches above the grate. If you can keep your hand there for about 1 second, you've got high heat; about 2 seconds means medium high.

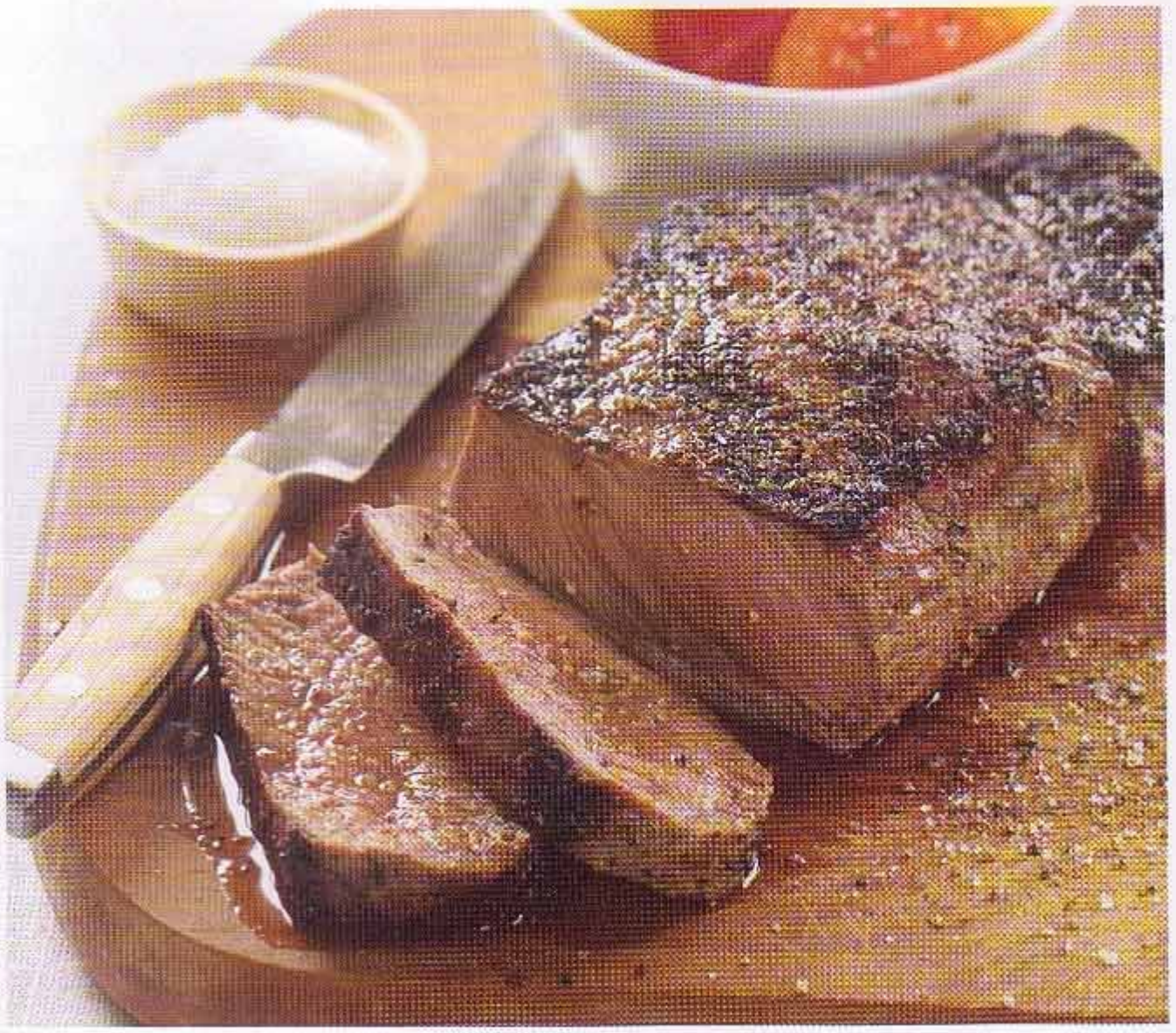
To prevent sticking, clean the grates with a wire grill brush as the grill heats up. Close the lid when you're done grilling, for easier cleanup; the trapped heat helps burn off food residue.

Keep the lid on. This helps control flare-ups, won't affect the sear, and helps the steaks cook quickly and evenly.

Flip the steaks just once (except for flank). The less you move them, the more easily they will develop a nice caramelized crust.

Slice it up

When slicing steak—especially the leaner cuts from the tougher parts of the steer—always cut across the grain for the most tender result. This means cutting perpendicular to the long parallel muscle fibers in the steak, so that the fibers in each cut piece are shorter and easier to chew.



6 tips for perfect medium rare

1 Before you grill, remove the chill. Take the steaks out of the fridge about 30 minutes before cooking so they'll cook evenly and quickly.

2 Go ahead and touch. With practice, you can gauge doneness by pressing on the meat. Rare feels quite soft, medium rare is slightly resilient, and medium has a bit more spring. If it's firm, you've overshot into medium-well or well-done territory.

3 If you're not sure, take a peek. Although cutting into the steak allows some juices to escape, it isn't the worst offense. Use the tip of a paring knife and cut near the center of the steak for a view of what's happening inside.

4 Pull the steak off just before it reaches your target doneness. Meat continues to cook a little after it's off the grill so be sure to allow for this "carryover cooking" when you're checking doneness.

5 For thicker cuts, use a digital instant-read thermometer. Steaks should be at least 1½ inches thick to get an accurate reading. For rare, remove the steak at 120° to 125°F; for medium rare, aim for 125° to 130°F; and for medium, 130° to 135°F. See inside for grilling times.

6 Let it rest before you carve. When you cook meat, the juices converge in the center. A 5- to 10-minute rest on a cutting board allows that moisture to redistribute, and your steak will be juicier for it.

Sarah Jay is a Fine Cooking *contributing editor.* ◆

Choosing Steak Knives

If you've taken the time to carefully choose and cook a juicy steak (see "Guide to Great Steaks for the Grill," p. 26a), don't massacre your masterpiece with poor cutlery. Shopping for steak knives can be overwhelming—prices range from less than $20 to more than $400 for a set of four, blade choices include serrated or smooth, and handle styles range from black plastic to all-stainless to exotic woods. After testing a range of steak knives, we suggest looking for the features listed in the sidebar at right.

The following knives (pictured above, in order) impressed our testers with their ease of cutting, balance, weight, and overall feel:

Chicago Cutlery's Kyoto knife was an overall favorite for its smooth, oval-shaped handle. Slightly longer and heftier than the other knives and with a modern look, this one outperformed many of the pricier models. A set of four is $99.99 at Kohls.com.

Chroma was the darling of testers, with its surgical design (by carmaker F. A. Porsche) and the way it feels like an extension of your hand. The knives are $139.95 for four at Amazon.com.

Solicut, a 60-year-old German cutlery company that just began selling in the United States, makes a beautifully balanced knife that glides through meat. Its triple-riveted handle comes in black, Brazilian kingwood, and Andalusian olive wood (shown, $84 each or $504 for a set of six at Cutleryandmore.com).

J. A. Henckels makes a Twin Four Star II knife that had more flexibility in the blade than the other models tested as well as thinner handles shaped to fit in the hand nicely. The knives cost $169.95 for four at Cooking.com.

Features to look for:

Non-serrated blades. Straight-edged knives glide, rather than saw, through meat, resulting in smooth, not jagged, pieces. Straight-edged knives can also be sharpened, and it's the sharp edge that's key to cutting through meat effortlessly.

Forged blades. To some degree, the price of knives is related to what they are made of and how they are made. Stamped knives are punched out of a sheet of steel, while forged knives are made by heating a thick piece of steel and pounding it into shape with a hammer. The forging process results in a heavier knife that holds a sharp edge longer, and this more involved process usually results in a more expensive knife. We think it's worth it.

Comfortable handles. I was impressed when I was offered a choice of six kinds of steak knives with my meal at a fine steak restaurant. It showed that the restaurant recognized that a large part of the performance of a knife is its feel, which differs from person to person.

To find the best knife for you, visit a well-stocked kitchen store where you can hold a range of knives. You'll get an idea of what handle material you prefer and what brand fits your hand well.

what's new

No overshadowing this scale

Measuring ingredients by weight is one of the easiest ways to become a better cook. Especially in baking recipes, relying on a scale instead of measuring cups will make you more efficient and accurate. We like this new digital scale from Oxo because of its pull-out display. No matter how broad the plate or bowl, it doesn't obscure the display and function buttons. And the scale was easy to figure out, with optional backlight, tare feature, and an 11-pound capacity. It runs on four AAA batteries, and the stainless-steel platform can be removed for cleaning. The scale is $49.99 at Oxo.com.

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Cork cutting board 26

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Compact kitchen equipment 28

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BY LISA WADDLE

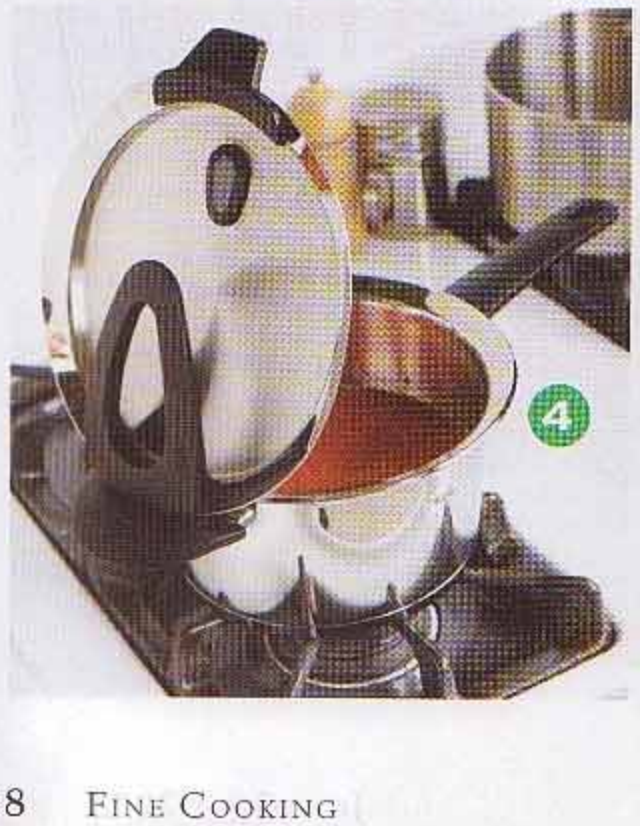
This cork is for cutting

With all the pressure to go green, it's a relief when an eco-friendly product boasts superior performance as well. This new cork cutting board from Architec provides a cushiony cutting surface that is easier than wood or plastic on the hand and arm. It's naturally nonslip, flame retardant, and lightweight. The surface proved durable in tests, showing no wear and absorbing no odor or stains when cutting herbs, nuts, and meats. Made from the same sustainable and renewable material as a traditional wine cork, the board must be handwashed. The 12x18-inch board shown here is $26.95 at Broadwaypanhandler.com.

Fingertip protection

In our side-by-side review of box graters on p. 30, we liked the idea of those with built-in hand protection. But we balked at the awkwardness, the bulk, and the extra step most of these devices required. This Microplane cut-resistant glove offers a nice measure of protection for knuckles and fingertips, especially given the razor-sharp cutting edges on the top-performing graters. Woven from synthetic fibers, the glove fits snugly on either hand and is machine washable. With it, you can breeze through the last little chunk of cheese and the smallest carrot nubbin with confidence. The glove comes in three sizes and is $24.95 at Microplane.com.

Photos: Scott Phillips, except top right this page, Tom Alle



Keeping it compact

Here's something you'll probably never hear from a cook: "I have plenty of kitchen storage room." Lack of space doesn't keep most us from adding to our stash of tools and gadgets, though. The trick to look for products that collapse or fold to ease the space crunch.

1 Collapsible strainer

Colanders usually take up lots of cabinet space, but this silicone one from Oxo's Good Grips line collapses to fit in a drawer. The 7½-inch-diameter colander drains, of course, but it also has a metal tab that fits nicely over the edge of a saucepan so you can blanch vegetables. It costs $20 and is available at Oxo.com.

2 Foldable protector

This collapsible cake cover from Antique Gadgets is made of plastic with a foldable steel frame, so it can slip in a cabinet or drawer when not in use. It costs $10, and you can buy it at Broadwaypanhandler.com.

3 Stacked racks

Cookie bakers will appreciate these nonstick stackable cooling racks, which make the most of limited counter space by going vertical. The racks are about 16x10 inches and can also be used singly. The three-tier set is $11 from Wilton.com.

4 Lid holder

When counter space is at a prem finding a spot to rest a saucepan when cooking can be a challenge (usually end up in the already-crov sink). That's why I like these Inten pans from Fissler: They have stay cool melamine handles that doub as lid holders, positioning the lids so that the condensation drips ba into the pot. These stainless-stee pans come in eight sizes, ranging from a 1.5-quart saucepan (show $145) to a 6.9-quart stew pot ($240). You can buy the Intensa l at Kitchenstoreon10th.com.

5 Foldable slicer

A mandoline makes quick work of slicing and cutting vegetables int julienne, but its awkward size can make it tough to store. This Zyliss Easy Slice 2 folds in half to a com 7¾ x 4½ x 2 inches. To switch am four slicing thicknesses, ranging f 1 mm to 6 mm, you turn a knob tha raises or lowers the cutting platfor so there are no separate blades t remove or insert (or lose). The julie setting produced nicely uniform zucchini sticks, and I found that th blade excelled at a range of foods from soft tomatoes to tough fenne comes with a food holder to prote your knuckles and fingers from the blade. The lightweight plastic mand retails for $35, and you can find a of stores at Kitchencollection.com

review

Box Graters

BY NICKI PENDLETON WOOD

There was a time when every bride could count on receiving a box grater at her wedding shower. Nowadays, pre-shredded ingredients, food processors, and hand-held rasps have taken over some of the box grater's tasks, so a grater has to perform above and beyond to earn a piece of the valuable kitchen cabinet real estate.

In many kitchens, it does so by being the workhorse of mealtime, thanks to a variety of grating surfaces. The large slicer blades work like a mandoline, quickly turning out thin, even cheese and potato slices. Coarse grater holes give nearly instantaneous vegetable shreds for fritters and slaw, and smaller punched holes are useful for grating nutmeg or zesting citrus.

Our testing turned some of our expectations about box graters on their heads and confirmed others. We thought a nonskid base was important, but it turned out not to be as vital as other features. We thought the extra faces of the six-sided graters would give them an advantage, but it turned out to be more choice than the average cook needs.

One thing we learned as we tested graters: They are only as good as the cutting surfaces are sharp. Every one we tried was better than my 20-year-old knuckle-buster. So do yourself a favor and upgrade if you're using an old one.

What to look for

For a box grater that will earn its place in your cabinet, look for these qualities:

Thicker-than-average metal. Graters fabricated with thicker walls feel sturdy, resist bending under pressure, and promise years of use.

Acid-etched blades. Found on the Microplane and Cuisipro models, these blades are made by a photochemical process that creates razorblade-like edges on both sides of each blade surface. Many other graters have a stamped cutting surface, which can tear food rather than cut it.

Deep grater holes, which yield bigger, more uniform, and more attractive shreds and slices.

Two sizes of grating/shredding holes: large for onions, firm cheese, and carrots; small for lemon zest, fresh ginger, and hard cheese, such as pecorino.

Helpful but not essential features include transparent sides marked with measurements, a catch bin that fits on the bottom, and a padded grip.

To protect fingers while grating, see the cut-resistant glove on p. 26.

Overall favorite

Microplane box grater

$35, Microplane.com

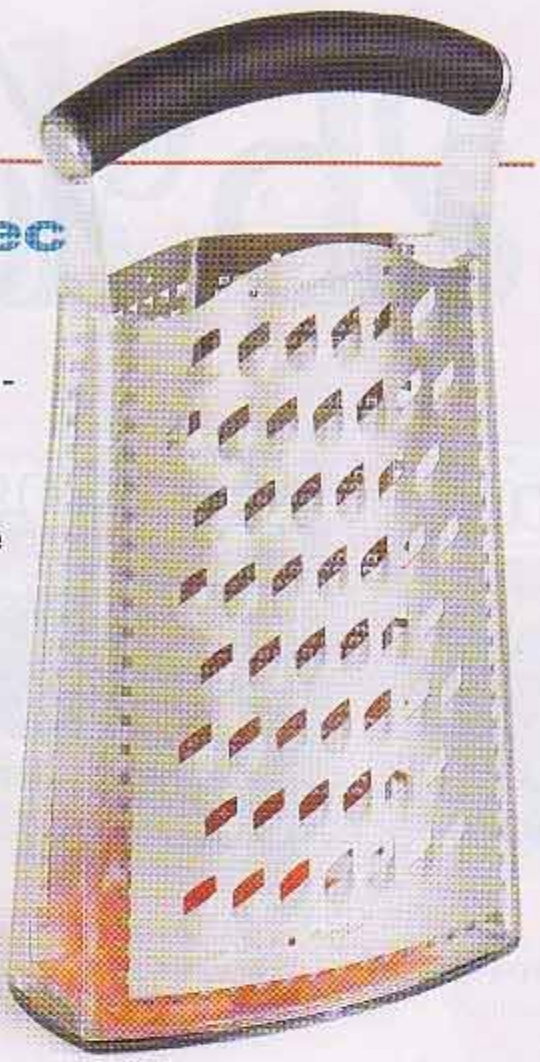
This new model replaces the company's Better Box Grater and made a favorable impression in every testing category, from the easy-to-hang tubular frame construction to the comfortable ergonomic bulb on the handle, to the nonskid feet. The acid-etched blades cranked out big, uniform potato flakes and gorgeous plump cheese curls. Julienne blades work in both directions for fast carrot shreds, while the slicer gave cracker-ready cheese slices.

How we tested

We tested 14 graters between 7½ and 10 inches tall with a minimum of three sides. We assessed each grater for design and construction, storability, and safety, as well as the following performance tests:

- Slicing and shredding potatoes
- Slicing and shredding firm cheese like Cheddar.
- Shredding and grating hard cheese, like Parmigiano-Reggiano
- Zesting lemons.

Runners-up



Cuisipro Accutec

$35, Kitchenstoreon10th.com

We liked the Accutec's clever triangular design, which incorporates several appealing features in a reduced footprint. It has a removable bottom, measurements on the transparent sides, and a rubber grip on the handle. The zester left most of the zest on the grater face and the shredder tore the potato into uneven shreds, but the acid-etched blades shredded hard cheese into beautiful thin shreds that melted quickly in hot foods.

Borner Combi-Chef

$80, Chefsresource.com

All our concerns about reduced footprint for storability went out the window when we used the Borner. At 10 inches high, 4½ inches wide, and 5 inches deep, this was the largest as well as the most expensive grater, but it performed so distinctively and efficiently that it got the nod. Whole potatoes were sliced to wafers in seconds, while the julienne face turned out true matchsticks. A brilliantly designed catch bin and a finger protection device mean you might prefer it to the food processor. The only weak performance came with the spiked food holder, which dug wedges out of sticky cheeses like block Cheddar.

Best values

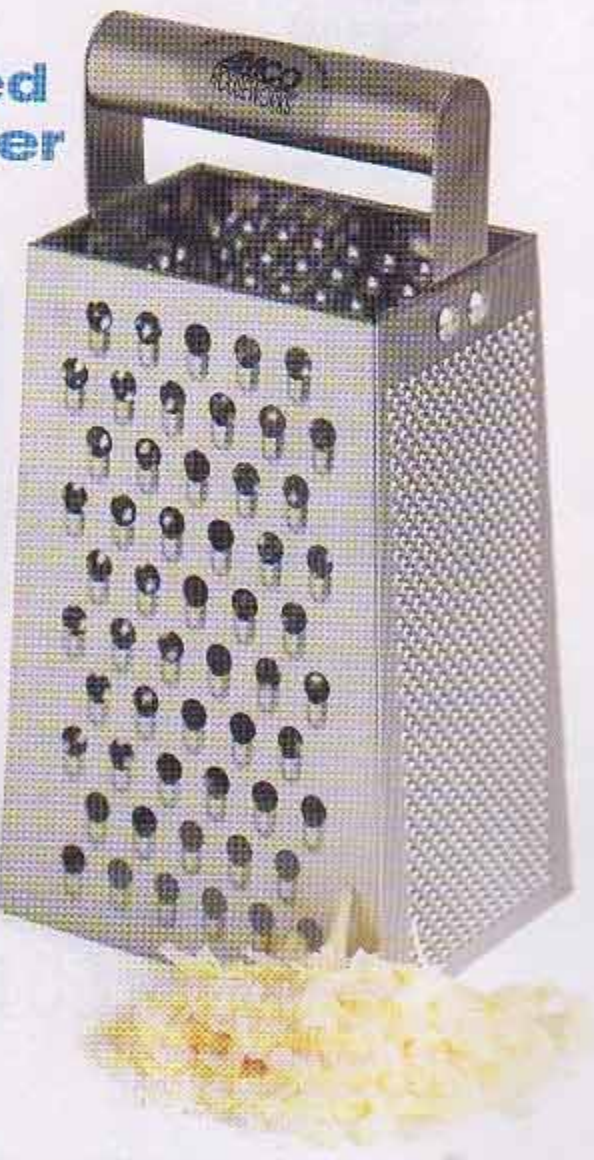
RSVP Endurance box grater

$15, Kitchenstoreon10th.com

On most tasks, this reduced-footprint grater performed well enough to be considered an all-arounder, earning our nickname, The Little Grater That Could. It has good stability and produced nice potato shreds and slices, fluffy shreds of hard cheese, and uniform shreds of firm cheese. The only downside: The zester removed all the peel from a lemon without yielding any zest; the small shredder holes, however, worked well for zest.

AMCO four-sided shredder & grater

$14, Cutleryandmore.com



Testers liked the sturdy, professional feel of this full-size grater, though it lacked an ergonomic handle, slicer blade, catch bin, and measurer—the bells and whistles that drew us to other models. All the blades were nicely sharp, and the big faces made short work of a block of cheese and a pile of potatoes, leaving them in even, attractive shreds. The only failure was in zesting: The large holes tore up the lemon's skin.

Nicki Pendleton Wood is a cookbook editor in Nashville, Tennessee. ◆

The Thrill of Discoverin Off-Beat Whites

Think beyond Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc for other interesting whites worth trying

BY TIM GAISER

As the first signs of summer appear, I'm ready to say good-bye to the full-bodied red wines I relished all through the cold months and open a bottle of crisp, chilled white. While I enjoy a glass of good Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc as much as the next person, I also love to explore other interesting, more unusual wines. Many of these off-beat whites are not only food-friendly and perfect for al fresco dining but also provide really go ues, which means you don't have to bre bank to indulge in your summer sipping every now and then you get tired of unc your usual bottle of white, try somethir different, and delicious. To get you s here are some of my favorite off-beat all of which are light, crisp, and fruity the thing for hot summer days.

Chenin Blanc

Chenin Blanc has long been one of the world's most underappreciated white wines, but it finally seems poised for its moment in the limelight. Some of the best wines from the Chenin grape are made in France's Loire Valley in the small appellations of Vouvray and Savennières. Here, the climate and soil combine with the grape's floral qualities to create wines with distinctive minerality and the aromas of ripe yellow apple, pear, and lemon fruit along with notes of honey and a touch of green herb. But Chenin Blanc is not exclusively French; it's grown in many other regions around the world, including South Africa, California, the Pacific Northwest, and Australia. While these New World Chenins generally lack the mineral quality of the Loire wines, they more than make up for it with their pleasantly abundant fruit.

What to drink it with:

Chenin Blanc pairs well with all kinds of summer fare, from tomato salads with feta, olives, and herbs to zesty chilled pastas and grilled shrimp with spicy cocktail sauce.

Bottles to try:

2006 Dry Creek Vineyards Dry Chenin Blanc, Dry Creek Valley, $14

2005 Hogue Cellars Chenin Blanc, Washington, $10

2006 Domaine Pichot Vouvray, France, $14

Pinot Gris

In the French region of Alsace, Pinot Gris is one of the "noble grapes." Along with Riesling, Gewürztraminer, and Muscat, it can qualify as a grand cru, one of the highest levels of wine and vineyard classification in France. Alsace Pinot Gris is known for its ripe, luscious melon and pear fruit with notes of spice and sweet orange citrus. But it also has an earthy dimension that adds complexity to the wine. In the New World, Pinot Gris has found a home in Oregon and New Zealand, where the wines have the same hallmark pear and melon fruit with citrus overtones but lack the distinct earthiness of the Alsace wines. Pinot Grigio—the same grape but grown in northern Italy—tends to be a much lighter, crisper white dominated by citrus fruit, almond, and mineral notes.

What to drink it wit

Try Pinot Gris with Asian stir-fried shrimp and any kind of shellfish. It's also delicious with grilled chicken or turkey sausag served with a tropical frui chutney. And for a cheese and wine pairing, try it wit a semihard variety such a Gruyère, Fontina, or a mil Cheddar.

Bottles to try:

2006 King Estate Pinot Gris "Signature Collectio Oregon, $16

2006 Huia Pinot Gris, Marlborough, New Zealand, $18

2004 Trimbach Pinot Gris Reserve, Alsace, France, $19

Photos: Sco

Unoaked Chardonnay

I know what you're thinking: No sooner have I encouraged you to get out of your Chardonnay rut than I'm back recommending more Chardonnay. But trust me, this is different. Many of the California Chardonnays we're used to drinking have aged in oak barrels. That's because oak aromas and flavors of vanilla, baking spices, and toast lend an appealing quality to the wines, making them incredibly easy to drink. But unoaked Chardonnay has been made in parts of France for centuries. There, the wines display brighter, crisper fruit offset by elegant mineral notes. In the last few years, Australian winemakers have made unoaked or lightly oaked Chardonnay popular, much to the delight of white-wine drinkers everywhere. And several California producers are beginning to take the oak out of their Chardonnays, too. Stripped of strong oaky flavors, Chardonnay tends to be crisper, with juicy Pippin apple and tropical fruit notes and vibrant hints of lime.

What to drink it with:
Unoaked Chardonnay is delicious with a variety of foods, from chilled poached salmon and roast chicken to grilled pork and warm potato salads.

Bottles to try:

2007 Wishing Tree Unoaked Chardonnay, Western Australia, $10

2006 Iron Horse Unoaked Chardonnay, Sonoma County, Green Valley, $26

2006 Brampton Unoaked Chardonnay, Stellenbosch, South Africa, $10

2006 Mâcon Charnay, Domaine Renaud, $14

Pinot Blanc

Originally an offspring of the French Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc is now grown throughout the wine world. But regardless of where it comes from, its round, creamy texture and bright apple and pear fruit make Pinot Blanc a crowd pleaser. In northern Italy the grape is called Pinot Bianco and the wines are lighter and crisper, with tart citrus and mineral elements. In the Alsace region of France, Pinot Blanc is richer and more luscious, with a touch of earthiness and a long finish. Pinot Blanc is also made in California, British Columbia (Canada), South Africa, and New Zealand. Here, too, the wines consistently display the ripe fruit and tangy citrus notes that make Pinot Blanc a quintessential summer sipping wine.

What to drink it with:
Pinot Blanc is delicious with bright seafood stews, tart and spicy Thai dishes, fresh summer salads, all kinds of charcuterie, and deviled eggs.

Bottles to try:

2005 Hugel Pinot Blanc "Cuvée Les Amours," Alsace, $18

2006 Laetitia Estate Pinot Blanc, Arroyo Grande Valley, California, $16

2005 Domaines Schlumberger Pinot Blanc "Prince Abbés," Alsace, $18

2006 A to Z Pinot Blanc, Oregon, $14

Dry Muscat

If you thought Muscat was only a sweet wine, think again. There are many varieties of Muscat grown around the globe, and Muscat wines are made in a wide range of styles, from sweet dessert wines all the way to dry table wines. Regardless of style, the Muscat grape is known for its exotic aromas and flavors of rose petal, ripe apricot and nectarine, tangerine citrus, litchi, and ginger spice. The most complex dry Muscats are produced in Alsace from the Muscat à Petits Grains variety and have an added dimension of earthiness and minerality. Dry Muscats from New World regions such as California, the Pacific Northwest, and Australia have less minerality and are all about the fruit, even though they're still quite dry.

What to drink it with:
Try a dry Muscat with chilled bean salads flavored with citrus and garden herbs, smoked fish such as trout or salmon, and grilled pork or sausages.

Bottles to try:

2007 Bonny Doon Ca' del Solo Muscat, Monterey, $15

2006 Meyer-Fonné Muscat, Alsace, $22

2006 Domaine Bott Frères Muscat d'Alsace, $22

Tim Gaiser is a contributing editor and a master sommelier. ◆

Winning t

Alternative use for a waffle maker

Pressed sandwiches are one of my favorite things for lunch, and you don't need a pan press to make them. I fire up my waffle iro and cook the sandwiches that way. The bre comes out toasty and crisp and the heated weight of the lid presses the sandwich to gooey perfection.

—Judy Wong, Oakland, Calif

A prize for the best tip

We want your best tips. We'll pay for the ones we publish, and we'll give a prize for the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or email fctips@taunton.com.

The prize for this issue's winner: a Fissler Blue Point Pressure Pan Set; retail value, $255.

Vote Help us pick the winning tip for a future issue; go to finecooking.com/vote

Storing summer fruits

I love cooking in the summertime when fresh berries and cherries are at their peak. To keep the fruit fresh between trips to the market, I put an ice pack in the bottom of a large stainless-steel bowl and set a colander of fruit on top. The air around the fruit stays cool and keeps the fruit fresh longer than when it is kept in the humid refrigerator. Of course, I check the ice pack often and replace it when necessary.

—Connie Lothkar, Olney, Maryland

Bargain grill basket

If your outdoor grill doesn't have a g basket, do what I do. I use an ice pic poke several small holes in the botto of a disposable aluminum pan. I add cut-up vegetables to the pan and the grill, shaking the pan occasionally fo even cooking. The disposable grill ba ket is easy to clean and can be reuse several times if washed gently.

—Karen Ann Bland, Gove, Ka

Magnetizing spice jars for easy access

I live in a condo with a small kitchen that suffers from lack of storage spac To store my spices in an accessible w I used hook-and-loop tape to adhere magnetic photo strip to the inside of cupboard door. I transferred my spic to tin shaker containers with magnet bottoms, labeled the lids, and stuck them onto the photo strip. It works beautifully, keeping my spices organi and easy to find when I am cooking.

—Pamela Tabb
Mahwah, New Je

Photos: Scott P

A little extra paper goes a long way

Quick breads, brownies, and bar cookies come out of their baking pans with ease when you use a little extra paper to line the pans. I like to leave a 2-inch overhang of parchment on two sides of my baking pan so that I can lift the baked goods out of the pan in one big piece.

—Deborah Tarentino, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Cutting sandwiches cleanly

When halving sandwiches with soft or slippery fillings like tuna salad or BLTs, I like to cut the top piece of bread separately and set the two pieces onto the sandwich. Then I cut through the filling and the bottom slice of bread, keeping the filling in place and the sandwich looking neat and appetizing.

—Helene Stone, Highland Park, Illinois

Grilling with mayonnaise

Before grilling, I like to brush my vegetables with mayonnaise instead of olive oil. Whether plain or seasoned with garlic, herbs, or spices, the mayonnaise clings effectively and imparts great flavor to the vegetables. It also forms a protective coating, keeping the vegetables from drying out on the grill. If used judiciously, it won't add any more fat to your food than using oil would.

—Yvonne Catty, via email

Hands-free spice-rubbed chicken

My family loves spice-rubbed chicken on the grill, but it's time consuming and messy to rub each piece of chicken with the spice mix. Instead, I put all the chicken pieces in a 9x13-inch Pyrex pan or plastic storage container, add the spice mix, attach the pan's lid, and shake vigorously for about 10 seconds. Each piece of chicken is evenly coated, and the force of the shaking ensures that the spices adhere well. Even better, I take the pan directly out to the grill, eliminating another dirty dish.

—John Davis, Spring, Texas

TOO GOOD TO FORGET

From *Fine Cooking* #17

Keep scallions from scattering

I love using finely chopped scallions, but I don't like chasing scallion wheels that careen off the cutting board. To make the scallions stay put, I cut a slit down the length of the scallion white before I start chopping.

—Diana Tarasiewicz, Grand Junction, Colorado

Makeshift muddler

We love making the mojito recipe from *Fine Cooking* #59 for our summer parties, but without a muddler on hand to mash the fresh mint and sugar, I found myself experimenting with other kitchen utensils to get the job done. My wooden honey swizzler turned out to be the perfect tool, and now it gets much more use as a muddler than as a swizzler.

—Caitlyn Sassaman, via email

STAFF CORNER

No-mess searing

Whenever I'm going to sear meat or sauté ingredients in oil over moderately high heat, I cover the other burners of my stovetop with aluminum foil to keep the spatter to a minimum and my stove mess-free.

—Laura Giannatempo, associate editor

Fresh
from the

Farm

Contributing editor Maryellen Driscoll gets inspiration for a summer celebration from her own harvest

Living "the simple life" on a small, sustainable farm can get rather complicated. With six acres of vegetables, hundreds of chickens, and a couple dozen mischievous steers to tend to, along with restaurant orders to fill, hay to make, and weekly farmers' markets to attend, we just don't do a lot of entertaining at this time of year. But with so much good food at our fingertips, time has to be made to share.

What I like about this menu is that it's full of fresh flavors and ingredients that almost anyone can find at local farmers' markets from midsummer to early fall. I can't help but use a lot of fresh herbs while they're in season and tasting their best. For starters, grilled flat breads (a guaranteed crowd pleaser and something that even a nonbaker can easily make) are served right off the grill, warm and chewy, with an herby lemon-garlic dipping oil. The oil is infused with earthy rosemary and brightly freckled with clean-tasting, fresh parsley for contrast. I can't get enough of it. The rest of the meal continues to benefit from the use of fresh herbs for garden-bright flavor in the potato and green bean salads and more nuanced complexity in the glazed grilled chicken. The way I see it, it's the season to let what's fresh speak for itself.

Another perk to this meal is that most of the cooking and prep work can be done ahead so that when your guests arrive you're not stuck in the kitchen. You can join in, whether that means kicking back in lawn chairs or in my case, handing out beers and relocating the party to whatever crop most needs weeding. Just keep an eye on the make-ahead lemon buttermilk pudding cakes. They have a way of vanishing before a party even gets started.

menu

Grilled Flatbreads

❖

Lemon-Garlic Oil with Herbs

❖

Grilled Chicken with Apricot-Balsamic Glaze

❖

Potato Salad with Olives, Scallions & Garden Herbs

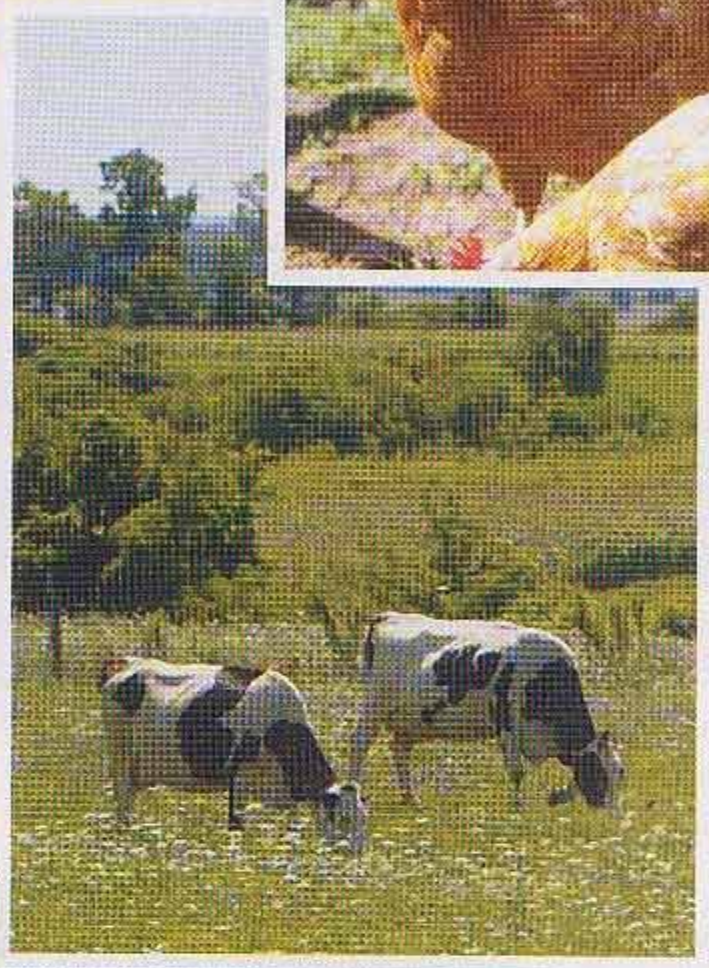
❖

Green Bean Salad with Tomatoes, Arugula & Basil Dressing

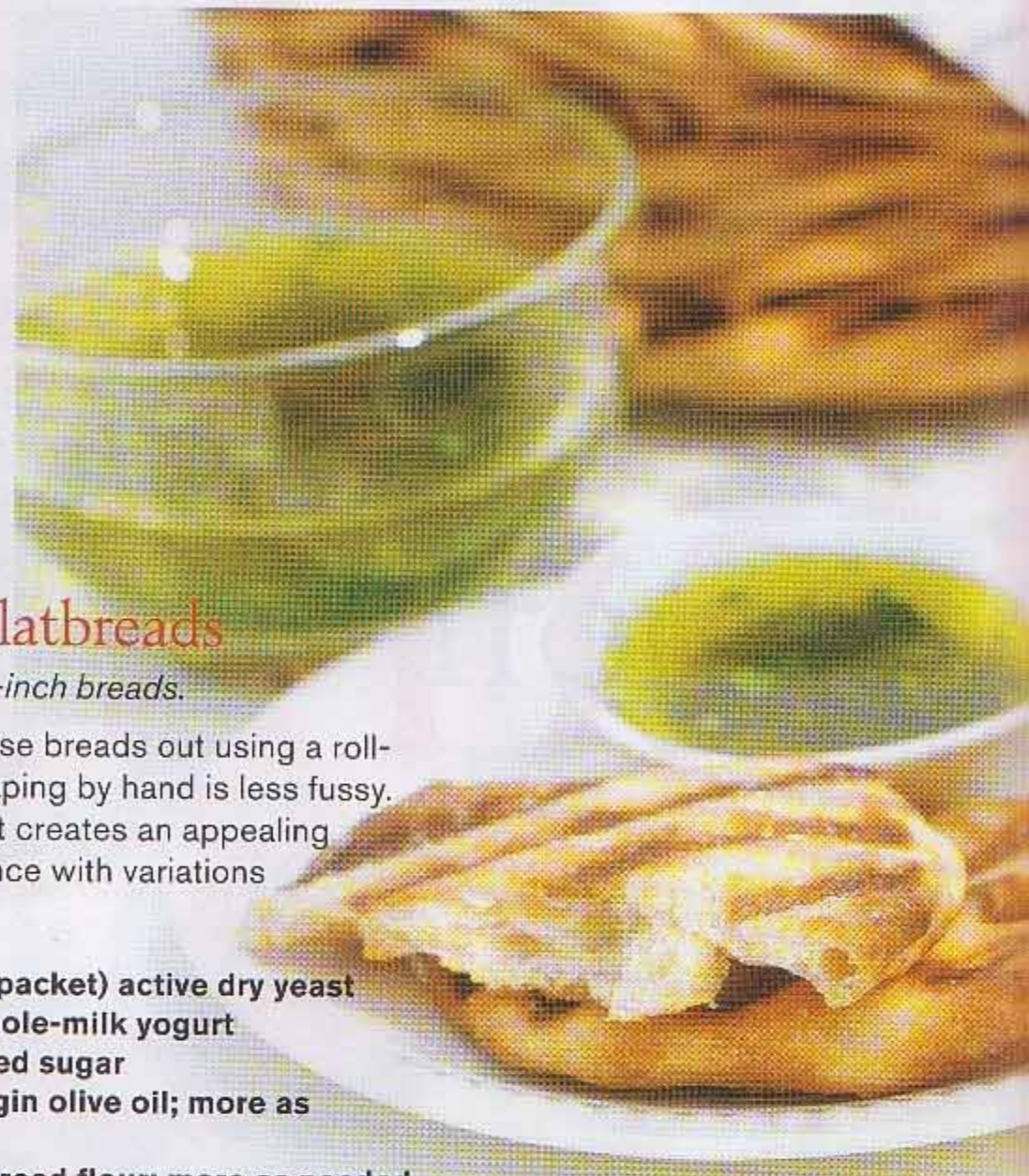
❖

Lemon-Buttermilk Pudding Cakes

www.finecooking.com



Maryellen Driscoll and her husband raise free-range chickens and grass-finished beef. For Maryellen's 3-year-old daughter that means baby chicks are a part of everyday life.



Grilled Flatbreads

Yields twelve 4-inch breads.

You can roll these breads out using a rolling pin, but shaping by hand is less fussy. And I like how it creates an appealing rustic appearance with variations in thickness.

2¼ tsp. (¼-oz. packet) active dry yeast
⅓ cup plain whole-milk yogurt
1 Tbs. granulated sugar
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed
9 oz. (2 cups) bread flour; more as needed
2¼ oz. (½ cup) whole-wheat flour
1 tsp. table salt
Kosher salt for sprinkling

Put ¾ cup warm water (105° to 115°F) in a food processor and sprinkle with the yeast. Let sit for a few minutes so the yeast begins to dissolve. Add the yogurt, sugar, and oil and process for 3 seconds to blend. Add the bread flour, whole-wheat flour, and table salt. Process for about 20 seconds and then scrape down the sides of the bowl with a spatula. Continue to process for another 30 seconds. The dough should form a mass, pulling away from the bowl's sides. If it's sticking to the sides, add more bread flour, 1 Tbs. at a time, just until the dough forms a cohesive, if slightly sticky, mass. (Try not to process more than 1 minute total.)

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface (see the tip at right). Knead by hand, flouring your hands if the dough is too sticky to handle, until it feels smooth and elastic, about 1 minute. Put the dough in a lightly oiled medium bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm, draft-free place until doubled in size, 45 to 60 minutes. (If you're making the dough ahead, punch it down after it doubles, cover it tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for up to 2 days.)

Prepare a medium-low grill fire; scr
the grill grate clean with a wire brush.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly flo
surface. Using a bench knife or chef's
divide the dough into 12 equal pieces
shape each into a ball. Let the balls re
covered with a clean towel, for about
10 minutes.

Using your hands, gently stretch th
balls into disks (4 to 5 inches in diame
and put them on two large lightly oiled
rimmed baking sheets. Let the disks re
covered with a clean towel, for 5 minu
Brush the tops with olive oil and sprin
lightly with kosher salt.

Grill, salted side down first, until th
bread develops golden-brown grill ma
on both sides, 1½ to 2 minutes per si
(depending on the size of your grill, yo
may need to grill the bread in two batc
Serve immediately with the Lemon-Ga
Oil with Herbs for dipping.

tip: For easier cleanup, knea
and shape the dough on a flex
cutting board or silicone bakin
liner dusted with flour instead
on your countertop.

Photos: Scott

Lemon-Garlic Oil with Herbs

Yields about ¾ cup.

If you have any leftovers, this dipping oil is equally good drizzled over sliced tomatoes, grilled summer squash, or just about any grilled meat or fish.

2 small lemons
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1½ Tbs. minced garlic
Two 3- to 4-inch sprigs fresh rosemary
3 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

With a vegetable peeler, peel the zest from the lemons in strips. Remove any white pith from the strips of zest, if necessary.

In a small saucepan heat the lemon zest, oil, garlic, and rosemary over low heat until the oil just begins to bubble, 3 to 5 minutes. The garlic should not brown, or it will taste bitter. Transfer the mixture to a small heatproof bowl and let cool to room temperature. Remove the zest and rosemary sprigs with a fork or tongs. Stir in the parsley. Serve with the Grilled Flatbreads (recipe at left).

Grilled Chicken with Apricot-Balsamic Glaze

Serves six to eight.

I suggest buying two whole chickens, about 4 lb. each, and cutting them into parts yourself (see a video at Finecooking.com). Packaged chicken parts often vary greatly in size, making it hard to get the pieces done at the same time. For a compromise, look in your butcher's display case for bone-in parts that are about the same size—legs about 5 oz. each, thighs about 6 oz., and breast halves a little more than a pound each.

2 Tbs. unsalted butter
½ cup apricot preserves (preferably without corn syrup; I like St. Dalfour's)
3 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
½ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
¼ tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
Kosher salt
Vegetable oil for the grill
Two 4-lb. chickens, each cut into 8 pieces, or 5 to 6 lb. good-quality bone-in skin-on chicken thighs, drumsticks, and breasts, each breast half cut into two pieces
Freshly ground black pepper

In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the preserves, vinegar, red pepper flakes, rosemary, and a large pinch of salt; stir to combine. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. (If making ahead, store covered in the refrigerator. Before using, warm over low heat to loosen the consistency.)

Prepare a medium gas or charcoal grill fire. Using a stiff wire brush, scrub the cooking grate thoroughly. Dip a folded paper towel into vegetable oil and, using tongs, rub it over the grill grate.

Season the chicken lightly with salt and pepper. Set the parts skin side down on the grill. Cook, covered, until the skin is golden brown, about 10 minutes. Stay near the grill, especially during the first 10 minutes, to manage any flare-ups, by moving pieces out of the way. If the chicken is browning too quickly, turn the heat down slightly or close the vents partially. Flip the chicken and cook until an instant-read thermometer reads 165°F in the thickest part of each piece, 5 to 10 minutes more. The thighs, legs, and thinner breast pieces are apt to cook a little faster than the thicker breast pieces. Transfer each piece to a platter when done and tent with foil.

When all the chicken is done, brush it with the glaze on all sides. Return the chicken to the grill and cook for another minute or so on each side to caramelize the glaze. Brush the chicken with any remaining glaze and serve.

Getting it done

Up to 2 days ahead:

Make the flatbread dough; refrigerate.

Cut up the chicken.

Up to 1 day ahead:

Make the lemon oil (hold the parsley); refrigerate.

Make the glaze for the chicken.

Make the dressing for the green bean salad; cook the beans.

Make the lemon cakes.

In the morning:

Make the potato salad; refrigerate.

Prep the remaining green bean salad ingredients.

Just before guests arrive:

Bring the potato salad to room temperature.

Bring the lemon oil to room temperature; stir in the parsley.

Gently warm the glaze, if made ahead.

Just before serving:

Shape and grill the flatbread.

Finish the green bean salad.

Grill the chicken.

Whip the cream for the cakes, if using.

Potato Salad with Olives, Scallions & Garden Herbs

Serves eight.

This potato salad is best made several hours ahead so that the flavors have time to meld. Feel free to experiment with different herbs in place of the mint, such as tarragon, oregano, or thyme. Keep the parsley, though; it makes a nice foundation.

3 lb. small to medium Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced ¼ inch thick
Kosher salt
¼ cup best-quality white-wine vinegar
1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper
⅓ cup chopped Kalamata olives
⅓ cup very thinly sliced scallions, both white and green parts
⅓ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
3 Tbs. finely chopped fresh mint leaves

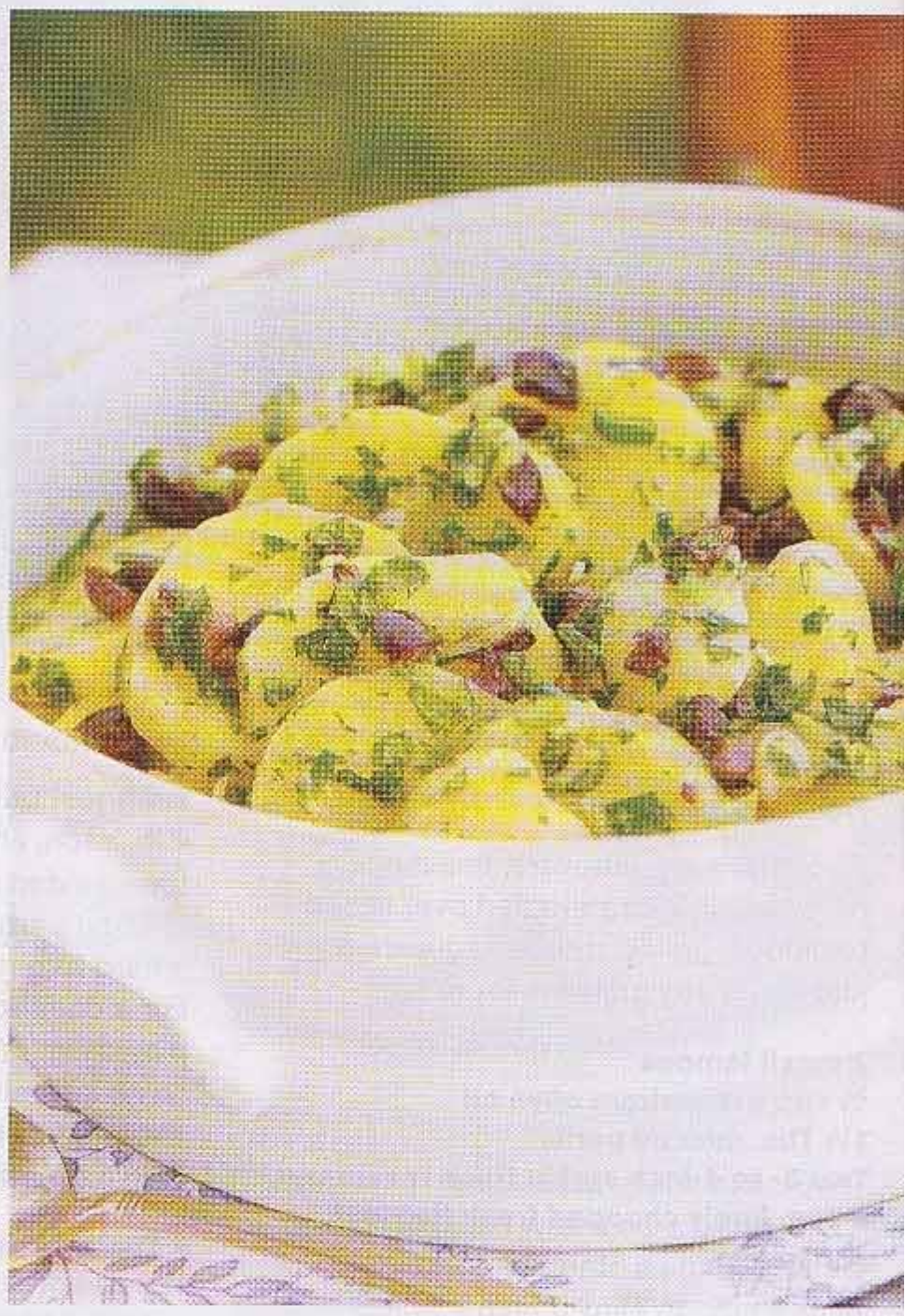
Put the potatoes in a 6-quart Dutch oven or similar pot and cover with cold water by at least one inch. Add 1½ Tbs. salt, bring to a boil over high heat, and reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cook until the potatoes are just tender, 6 to 8 minutes from when the water comes to a boil (stir gently and don't overcook, or the potatoes will fall apart).

Meanwhile, in a bowl or liquid measuring cup, whisk the vinegar and mustard. Whisk in the olive oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Drain the potatoes in a colander and spread them on a rimmed baking sheet. While they're still hot, drizzle them evenly with 3 Tbs. of the dressing. Let cool completely.

Transfer the cooled potatoes to a serving bowl. Sprinkle with the olives, scallions, parsley, and mint. Pour about ½ cup of the remaining vinaigrette over the salad. With a large spoon or rubber spatula, gently toss. Take care to break as few of the potato slices as possible. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Let sit at room temperature for at least an hour so the flavors can blend. (You can make this salad up to 12 hours ahead; just cover and refrigerate, and return to room temperature before serving.)

Just before serving, season to taste again with salt and pepper and add more dressing if the salad seems dry—you may not need all of the dressing.



Green Bean Salad with Tomatoes, Arugula & Basil Dressing

Serves eight.

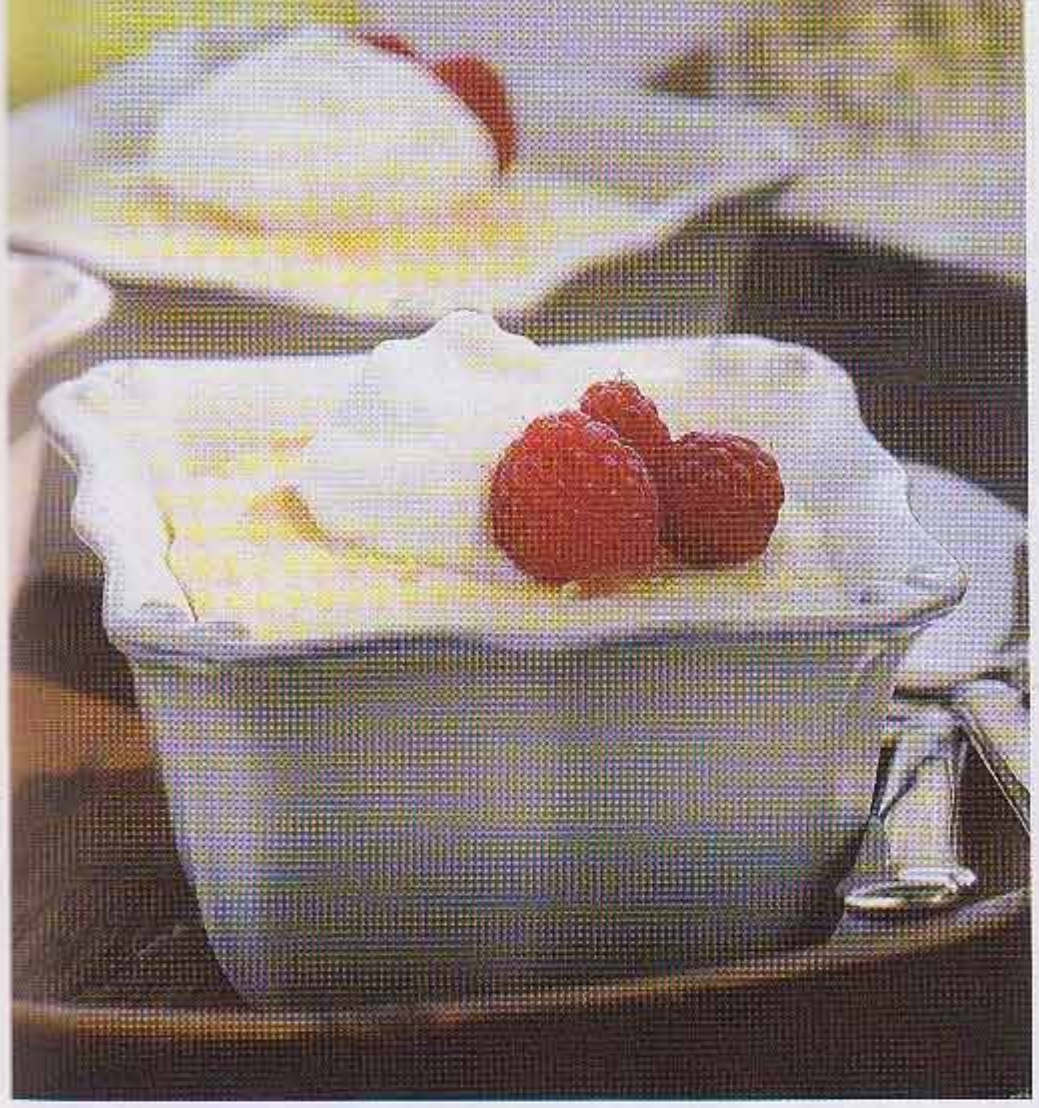
1 cup loosely packed basil leaves
2 strips lemon zest about 3 inches long and ½ inch wide, white pith removed
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt
2 lb. fresh slender green beans, trimmed (long ones snapped in half)
2 cups arugula, rinsed and spun dry
2 cups cherry tomatoes (about ¾ lb; preferably a mix of red, orange, and yellow), halved
1½ cups (10 oz.) 1-inch-diameter fresh mozzarella balls (*ciliegine*), halved
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper

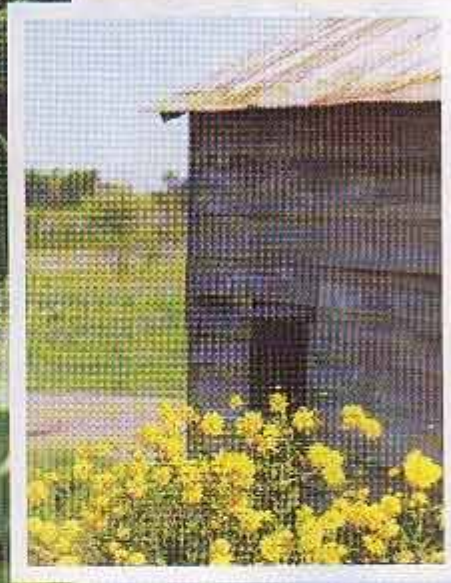
Fill an 8-quart stockpot three-quarters full of water and bring to a boil over high heat. Put the basil and lemon zest in a metal sieve, immerse it in the boiling water, and blanch for 5 seconds. Remove, tapping the sieve over the sink to shake off excess water. Turn off the burner but leave the water in the pot with the cover on.

Roughly chop the lemon zest. Put the basil and lemon zest in a blender and pulse a few times. With the blender running, pour the olive oil through the lid's fill hole and purée until smooth, stopping to scrape down the sides of the blender as needed. Transfer to a small bowl or liquid measuring cup and cover. Refrigerate until ready to assemble the salad.

Return the water to a boil over high heat. Add 2 Tbs. salt and the beans. Cook until the beans are crisp-tender or fully tender, depending on your preference, 4 to 6 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water. Spread the beans on a large rimmed baking sheet and refrigerate to cool completely. If making more than an hour ahead, cover and refrigerate.

In a large bowl, combine the cooled beans with the arugula, tomatoes, and mozzarella. Toss with the basil oil and lemon juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper and more lemon juice.





Lemon-Buttermilk Pudding Cakes

Yields 8 individual cakes.

These cakes have a thin layer of pudding on the bottom and a cheesecake-like layer on the top.

1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly, plus about 2 tsp. more, softened, for the ramekins
¾ cup granulated sugar
3 large egg yolks, at room temperature
1 cup buttermilk, at room temperature
¼ cup whole milk, at room temperature
1⅛ oz. (¼ cup) all-purpose flour
¼ tsp. table salt
⅓ cup fresh lemon juice, at room temperature
4 large egg whites, at room temperature
1 Tbs. finely grated lemon zest
½ cup lightly sweetened whipped cream, for serving (optional)
1 cup fresh raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, or sliced strawberries, for serving (optional)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter eight 6-oz. ramekins and arrange them in a roasting pan or in two 8x8-inch Pyrex baking dishes. Fill a kettle with about 6 cups of water. Bring to a boil and set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk the melted butter with ½ cup of the sugar and the egg yolks until smooth and light, about 1 minute. Whisk in the buttermilk, milk, flour, and salt just until smoothly blended. Whisk in the lemon juice.

In a large bowl, beat the egg whites with an electric mixer (a hand-held or stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment) on medium speed until frothy, 30 to 60 seconds. Increase the speed to high and beat just until the whites hold soft peaks—the peak should flop over immediately when the beater is lifted—30 to 60 seconds. Reduce the mixer speed to medium and very slowly sprinkle in the remaining ¼ cup sugar. If necessary, stop the mixer and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Beat on high speed until the whites hold medium-firm peaks—the peak should hold its shape pretty well when the beater is lifted, but the tip will curl over on itself—30 to 60 seconds.

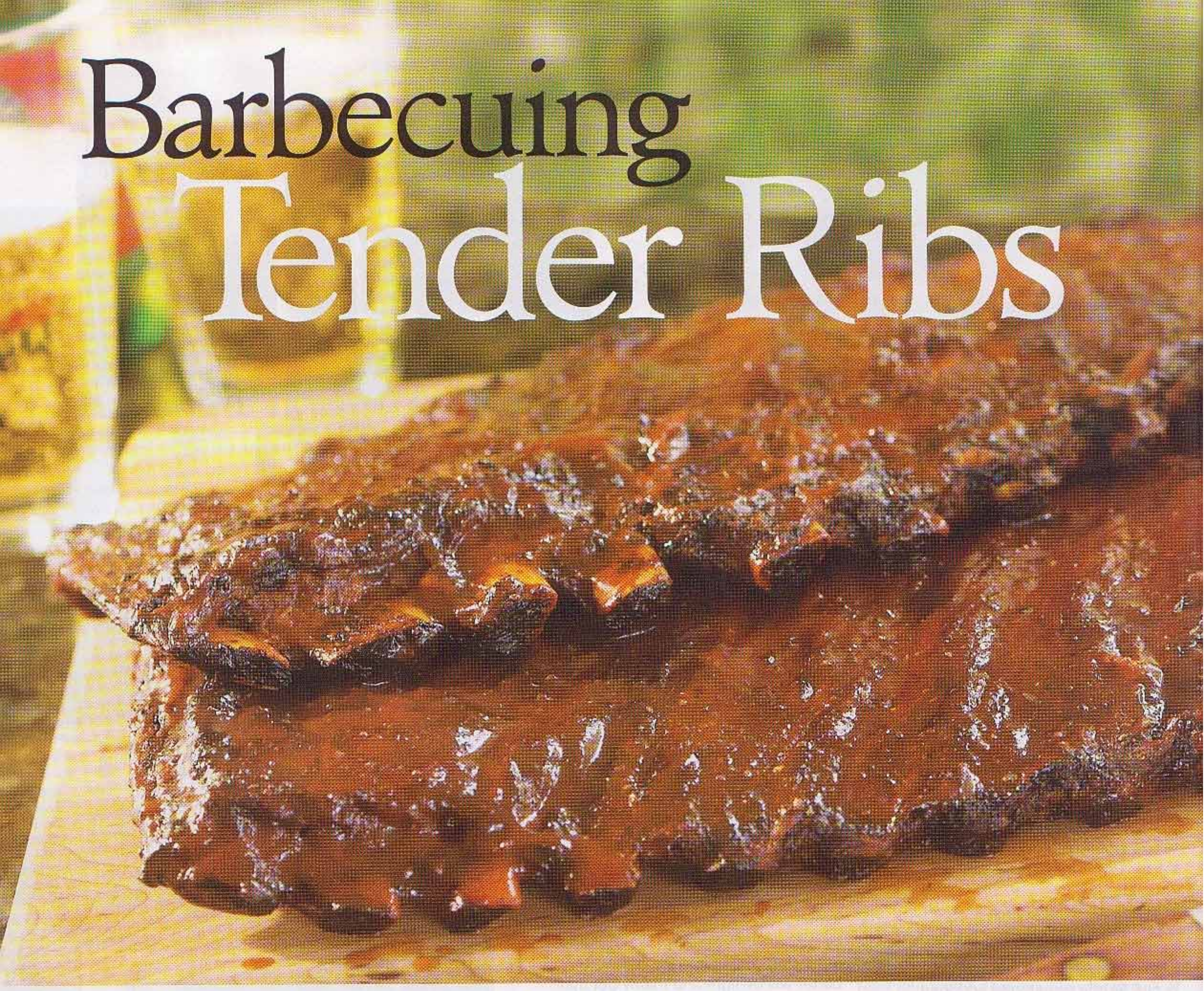
Spoon one-third of the whites onto the egg yolk mixture, sprinkle with the lemon zest, and gently whisk to blend. Using the whisk, gently fold and stir the remaining whites into the batter. The batter will be light and foamy but thin.

Spoon the mixture evenly among the ramekins—you can fill them to the top. Put the roasting pan with the ramekins in the oven and pour enough hot water from the kettle into the pan to reach about halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake until the tops of the cakes are light golden and puffed, 25 to 30 minutes. They should spring back slightly when touched. Take the cakes out of the water bath and let cool on a rack to room temperature. Then refrigerate for at least 2 hours and up to 24 hours before serving. Top the cakes with a small dollop of whipped cream and garnish with a few fresh berries, if using.

Maryellen Driscoll, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, *lives and works on Free Bird Farm in upstate New York.* ◆

Everything looks tranquil, but with six acres of organic vegetables, Free Bird Farm is hectic in the summer.

Barbecuing Tender Ribs



Learn the secrets to making smoky barbecued pork ribs in

BY JAMIE PURVIANCE

For most outdoor cooks, barbecued ribs occupy a place outside the typical comfort zone of hamburgers, steaks, and chops. The intricacies of slow-cooked, smoky barbecue seem shrouded in mystery. What with all the insanely complex spice rubs, glazes, and sauces, plus the vagaries of tending live fires, it's a cult better left to the pros, right?

Wrong! I'm here to open the doors to the inner sanctum of the barbecue world and show you how easy pork ribs can be. Your biggest obstacle is time. That's it. Just the time it takes for the rib meat to surrender its grisly texture and collapse into tender shreds of succulence beneath a slightly crisp and caramelized surface. If you've got time and an outdoor grill, you can barbecue great ribs.

Start by choosing your ribs. Pork is traditional for barbecuing, and the two most popular choices are baby backs and spareribs. Baby backs, also known as top loin or loin back ribs, are smaller (2 to 2½ pounds per rack) and more expensive. They're cut "high on the hog," near the backbone, where pork chops and tenderloins come from, so they're usually more tender.

Spareribs are larger (4 to 5 pounds per rack, untrimmed) and less expensive. They come from the belly of the animal, close to the section that's turned into bacon. They're usually meatier, fattier, and more flavorful. I like to barbecue St. Louis-style spareribs, which are regular spareribs minus a few chewy odds and ends: the breastbones along the bottom, the pointed tops at one end, and a strip of scraggly meat dangling from the bone side. If your store has only regular spareribs, ask the butcher to trim them St. Louis-style for you.

Truly great ribs are layered with the flavors of a rub, a mop, and a sauce. I've given you recipes for two different but classic combos that balance sweet, spicy, salty, and savory flavors. My goal is a series of harmonic supporting flavors that complement the most

Photos: Scott Phillips

Apple-Bacon Barbecued Spareribs

your own back yard

important thing of all—the inherent flavor of the meat.

When your ribs are done is largely a matter of taste. As a judge at many big barbecue competitions, I've tasted my share of ribs. For me, the very best ones are really tender but not so tender that the meat is falling off the bone. I like a little chew left in the meat, and that's the doneness test I've given in my recipe. Baby backs require three to four hours of cooking from start to finish. Spareribs take four to five hours. That's the main difference; otherwise, the technique for barbecuing either is essentially the same. If you prefer more tender ribs, just cook them longer.

1 Pick your ribs

Serves six to eight.

2 racks St. Louis-style spareribs (3 to 3½ lb. each)

OR

3 racks baby back ribs (2 to 2½ lb. each)

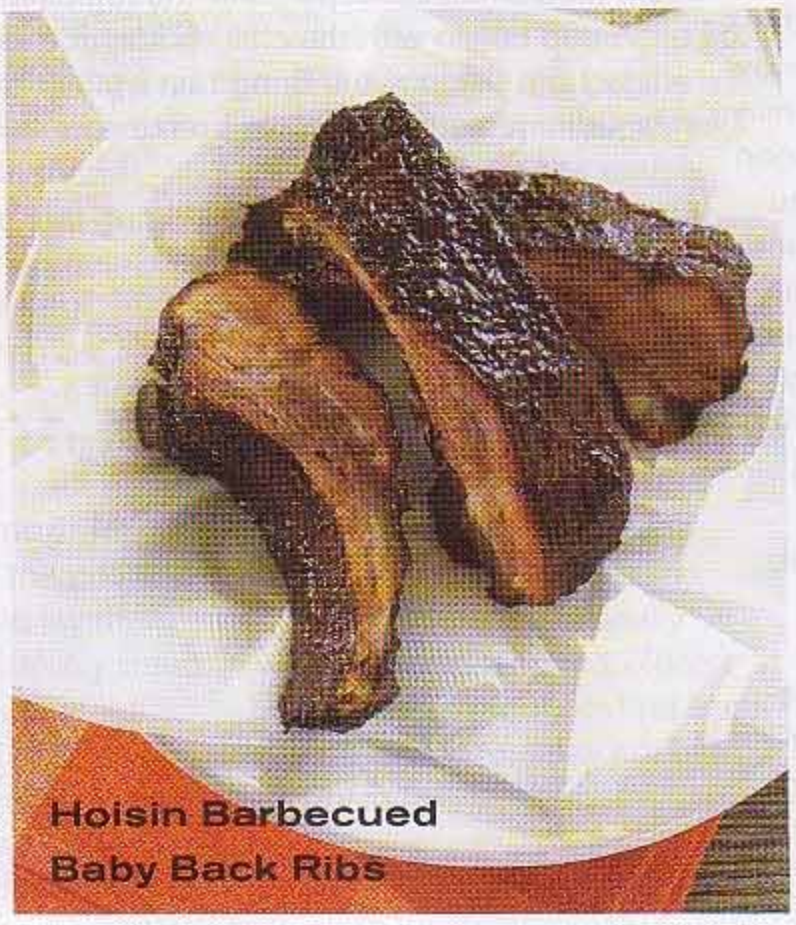
Slide the blade of a dinner knife under the thin, translucent silverskin that covers the bone side of each rack (note that some racks are sold with the silverskin already removed). Lift and loosen the membrane until you can grab it with a paper towel; pull it off and discard.

If left on, the silverskin keeps seasonings and smoke from penetrating the meat.

Toolbox

In addition to a gas or charcoal grill, you'll need a few other items. Check a hardware store or see p. 82 for mail-order sources.

- Charcoal briquettes or a full tank of propane
- Hickory wood chips
- Metal rib rack (to allow all the ribs to fit on the grill at once)
- Basting brush or barbecue mop
- Smoker box or disposable aluminum drip pan
- Tongs
- Grill thermometer (ideally in the grill's lid; otherwise, hang a heat-safe thermometer through a vent in the lid)


Hoisin Barbecued Baby Back Ribs

Game plan: ribs for dinner

Whether you're making baby backs or spareribs, some racks take longer to cook than others, so you'll want to be flexible about your serving time.

To have the ribs ready by 6 to 7 p.m., start barbecuing spareribs at 1:30 p.m. or baby backs at 2:30 p.m.

About an hour before your start time, soak the wood chips, season the ribs, and prepare your grill fire.

Make the mop and sauce during the first hour of cooking.

Have your side dishes ready by 6 p.m., and choose dishes that won't suffer if they have to wait for the ribs. If a side dish needs reheating, do so while the ribs rest.

2 Pick your flavors

Apple-Bacon Barbecued Ribs

The smoky-sweet-spicy flavor of this rub and sauce is a classic complement for pork ribs.

2 cups hickory wood chips

FOR THE SPICE RUB:
4 tsp. kosher salt
2 tsp. ancho chile powder
2 tsp. sweet paprika, preferably Hungarian
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. celery seed
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE MOP AND SAUCE:
¼ lb. (4 to 5 slices) bacon
¾ cup apple juice
5 Tbs. apple cider vinegar
½ cup ketchup
2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
½ tsp. ancho chile powder
½ tsp. sweet paprika, preferably Hungarian
¼ tsp. ground cumin
¼ tsp. celery seed
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Soak the wood chips in water for about 1 hour.

Make the rub and season the ribs: In a small bowl mix the spice rub ingredients. Sprinkle the rub all over the ribs, seasoning the meaty sides a little more than the bone sides and working the rub into the meat. Stand the ribs upright in a rib rack so that the meaty sides face the same direction. Leave as much room as possible between the racks; they shouldn't touch. Let the racks sit at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes while you prepare the grill.

Make the mop and sauce: Cook the bacon in a medium skillet over medium-low heat until browned and crisp, 10 to 15 minutes, turning occasionally. Drain the bacon on paper towels and eat it whenever you like. Pour about one-half the bacon fat into a small saucepan and reserve the remaining fat in the skillet for the barbecue sauce. To the saucepan, add ½ cup of the apple juice and 2 Tbs. of the cider vinegar. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and then remove from the heat (this is the mop).

Add the remaining ¼ cup apple juice, 3 Tbs. cider vinegar, and the ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, chile powder, paprika, cumin, celery seed, and pepper to the bacon fat in the skillet. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking until smooth. As soon as the sauce simmers, remove the skillet from the heat.

Hoisin Barbecued Ribs

You'll get darker ribs with this Asian-inspired rub and sauce combo, but the taste is not overpowering. See Tasting Panel, p. 80, for our top hoisin sauce picks.

2 cups hickory wood chips

FOR THE SPICE RUB:
1 Tbs. ancho chile powder
1 Tbs. ground cumin
1 Tbs. kosher salt
2 tsp. five-spice powder
2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE MOP AND SAUCE:
¾ cup lager beer (such as Heineken)
¾ cup hoisin sauce
⅓ cup mild chili sauce (such as Del Monte or Heinz)
2 Tbs. rice vinegar
1 Tbs. Asian sesame oil

Soak the wood chips in water for about 1 hour.

Make the rub and season the ribs: In a small bowl, mix the spice rub ingredients. Sprinkle the rub all over the ribs, seasoning the meatier sides a little more than the bone sides and working the rub into the meat. Stand the ribs upright in a rib rack so that the meaty sides face the same direction. Leave as much room as possible between the racks; they shouldn't touch. Let the racks sit at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes while you prepare the grill.

Make the mop and sauce: In a small measuring cup, mix the beer and ¼ cup of the hoisin (this is the mop).

In a small saucepan, mix the remaining ½ cup hoisin with the chili sauce, rice vinegar, and sesame oil. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and remove from the heat.

Press the spice rub onto both the meat and bone sides of the ribs before cooking to lay a foundation of flavor.

After the initial hour (for baby backs) or two (for spareribs) of smoking, apply the mop to add still more flavor and keep the ribs moist.

Let the cooked ribs rest at room temperature to absorb the sauce—the final layer of flavor.

3 Pick your fire

Gas grill

Drain the wood chips.

If your grill has a smoker box, follow the manufacturer's instructions for lighting the wood chips and heat one of the grill's burners on high (for indirect heat).

If your grill doesn't have a smoker box, lay the chips evenly inside a small disposable aluminum drip pan. Cover the pan with foil. Poke 10 to 15 holes in the foil. Remove the cooking grate from the grill. With the lid open, light the grill with all burners on high. Close the lid and heat the grill for 10 to 15 minutes.

Using tongs or an insulated mitt, set the pan of wood chips in one of the rear corners of the grill, right over a lit burner or two (or over the steel bars covering the burners). Replace the cooking grate. Close the lid and wait until smoke pours out of the chip pan, usually 20 to 30 minutes. Then turn off all the burners except the one just below the chips.

Position the ribs: Carefully set the rib rack on the side of the cooking grate opposite the lit burner, with the bone sides of the racks facing the lit burner. (The bones will protect the meat from cooking too quickly.) Close the lid and adjust the remaining burner until the temperature is 300°F—this could require a low, medium, or high setting, depending on your grill. Smoke the ribs for 1 hour for baby backs, 2 hours for spareribs.

Brush on the mop: Remove the ribs from the grill and from the rib rack and lay them on a large rimmed baking sheet. Lightly brush the ribs on both sides with about half of the mop. Carefully put the ribs back in the rib rack, again all facing the same direction but this time turned upside down so that the parts that haven't browned as much will get more exposure to the heat and smoke. Return the rib rack to the cool side of the grill, again facing the bone sides toward the heat. Close the lid.

Finish cooking: Let the ribs cook until the meat shrinks ¼ to ½ inch from the ends of at least several bones, 2 to 3 hours longer, and then check them for doneness (see Step 4). During this time, baste the ribs occasionally with the remaining mop (don't bother removing them first from the rib rack). You may not use all the mop.

Charcoal grill

Prepare the grill: Open the vents on the bottom and top of the grill. Using a chimney starter or other method, light about 50 charcoal briquettes and let them burn until they are completely ashed over. Push the briquettes to one side and then spread them evenly to cover about one-third of the charcoal grate. Carefully set a large disposable drip pan on the opposite side of the charcoal grate and fill it about three-quarters full with warm water. Put the cooking grate in place, positioning a hinged section over the coals. Leave the lid off and let the briquettes burn until they are three-quarters of their original size and then close the lid. Let the fire burn down until a thermometer in the grill's lid registers 300° to 325°F.

Drain about half the wood chips and scatter them over the burning coals. (If your grill doesn't have a hinged section, carefully lift the cooking grate off the grill, scatter the chips, and then replace the cooking grate.)

Position the ribs: Set the rib rack on the cooking grate over the drip pan, with the bone sides of the ribs facing the coals. (The bones will protect the meat from cooking too quickly.) Let the ribs smoke for 45 minutes. Check every 10 minutes or so, and if the temperature rises above 325°F, close the top vents halfway; otherwise, leave the vents completely open. If the temperature drops below 250°F, add 5 to 10 unlit briquettes to the fire.

After the ribs have cooked for 45 minutes, drain the remaining wood chips and gently spread them over the coals (don't stir up any ashes). Close the lid. Let the ribs smoke 15 minutes more for baby backs, 1 hour 15 minutes more for spareribs.

Brush on the mop: Remove the ribs from the grill and from the rib rack and lay them on a large rimmed baking sheet. At this point, to maintain the heat, add about 10 unlit briquettes to the bed of burning coals and leave the lid off while you mop the ribs (the added oxygen will help light the new briquettes). Lightly brush the ribs on both sides with about half of the mop. Carefully put the ribs back in the rib rack, again all facing the same direction but this time turned upside down so that the parts that haven't browned as much will get more exposure to the heat and smoke. Return the rib rack to the grill over the drip pan, again turning the bone sides toward the coals. Close the lid.

Finish cooking: Let the ribs cook until the meat shrinks ¼ to ½ inch from the ends of at least several bones, 2 to 3 hours more, and then check them for doneness (see Step 4). During this time, the fire should slowly lose heat, but if it falls below 250°F, add 5 to 10 unlit briquettes to maintain a temperature between 275° and 300°F. Also during this time, baste the ribs occasionally with the remaining mop (don't bother removing them first from the rib rack). You may not use all the mop.

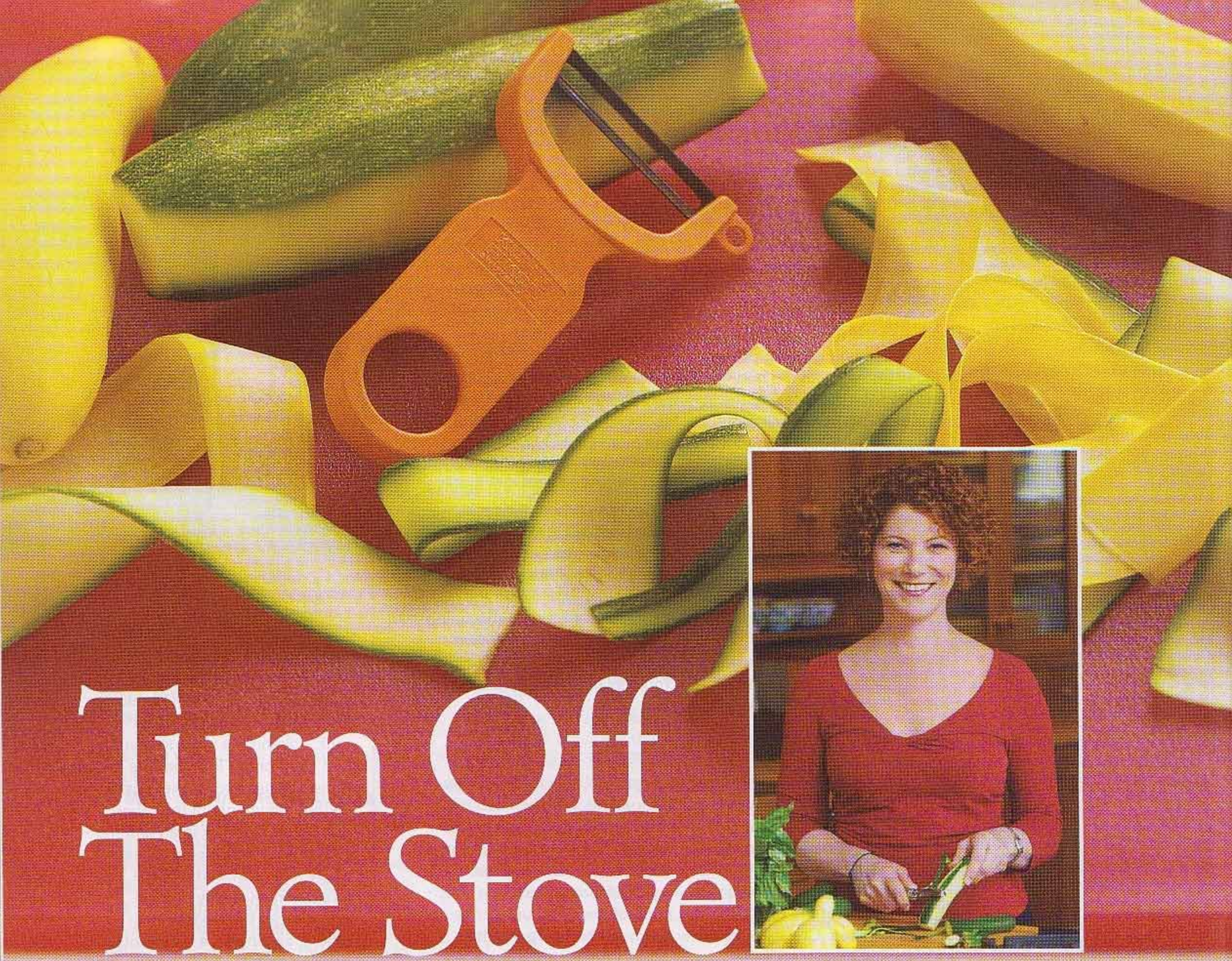
4 Finish your ribs

Knowing when they're done

When the rib meat has shrunk ¼ to ½ inch from the ends of several bones, lift each rib rack one at a time from the metal rack, holding the meat at one end with tongs. Turn the ribs bone side up and let them hang so that the weight of the other end bends the rack in an arc. If the meat separates and tears easily near the middle of the arc, that rack is fully cooked. Some racks take longer than others, as long as 4 hours total cooking time for baby backs and 5 hours for spareribs.

Finally, brush on the sauce: As each rack of ribs is fully cooked, lay it on a large sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Lightly brush the ribs on both sides with the sauce—you may not need it all. Then wrap each rack individually in the foil. Let them sit at room temperature for 15 to 30 minutes for baby backs and 30 to 45 minutes for spareribs. Unwrap the racks, cut them into individual ribs, and serve warm.

Jamie Purviance is a chef from the San Francisco Bay area and the author of Weber's Real Grilling *and* Weber's Charcoal Grilling. ◆



Turn Off The Stove

These fresh, easy vegetable side dishes don't need cooking

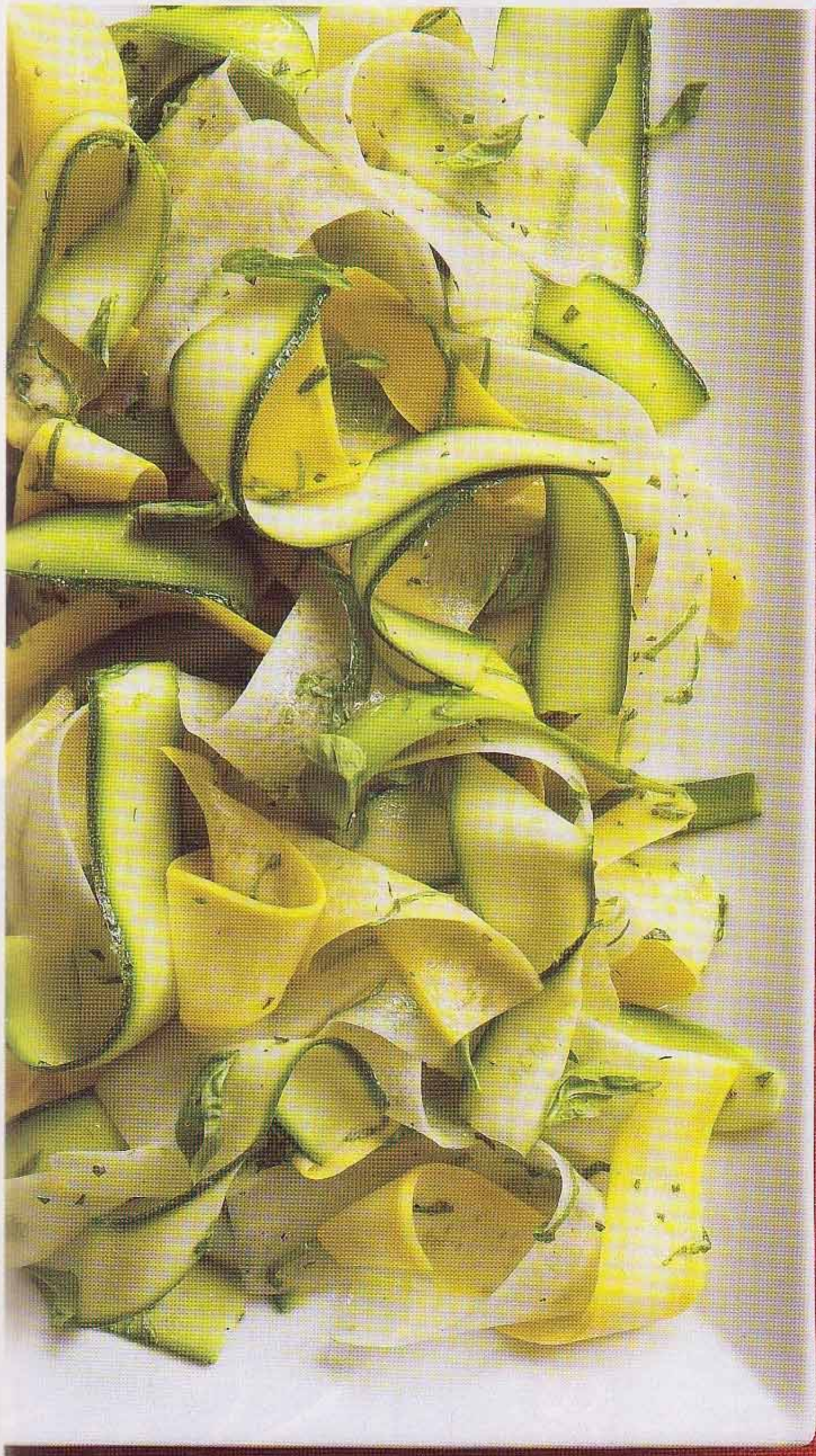
BY JOANNE WEIR

Come summertime, I try to stay away from a hot stove as much as possible. But this doesn't mean I give up cooking altogether. For me, it's all about preparing simple, fresh meals that require as little cooking as possible. So my summer menus often feature grilled steaks, chicken, or fish (grilling doesn't really count—if you're like me, you probably grill outside) and quick, vibrant side dishes that require no cooking and showcase the best vegetables and herbs the season has to offer.

The key to great-tasting no-cook sides is to buy fresh summer vegetables that are as good raw as they are cooked, such as tomatoes, carrots, zucchini, and cabbage (the only exception here is cucumbers, which I never cook). Then, all you have to do is toss them with a generous amount of fresh herbs and a light olive oil dressing made with citrus juice or vinegar to bring them alive. It's that simple. Just make sure you dress these dishes close to serving time, or the vegetables will wilt or become watery.

It's also important to find the best ways to cut and prep the vegetables and to figure out what flavor partners make each one shine. For example, I slice summer squash and daikon radish in thin ribbons for a crunchy texture and a beautiful appearance, and I toss them with a lemon dressing and lots of fresh oregano and basil. I marinate ripe tomatoes in a balsamic vinaigrette to bring out their sweet juiciness. And rather than make slaw with green cabbage only, I mix in other varieties like Savoy, red cabbage, and even radicchio—each lending a different texture, color, and flavor—and toss them with a dash of rice vinegar, soy sauce, and ginger for some Asian flair. For my cucumber and feta salad, I like to leave some of the peel on the cukes for color and cut them in big chunks so they don't become mushy. And finally, you can't go wrong with sweet carrots in summer. I love the crunchy texture of grated carrots, which I pair with lime and cilantro for an especially refreshing summer side dish.

Photos: Scott Phillips, except author photo above, Thor Swift



Zucchini

Zucchini & Yellow Squash Ribbons with Daikon, Oregano & Basil

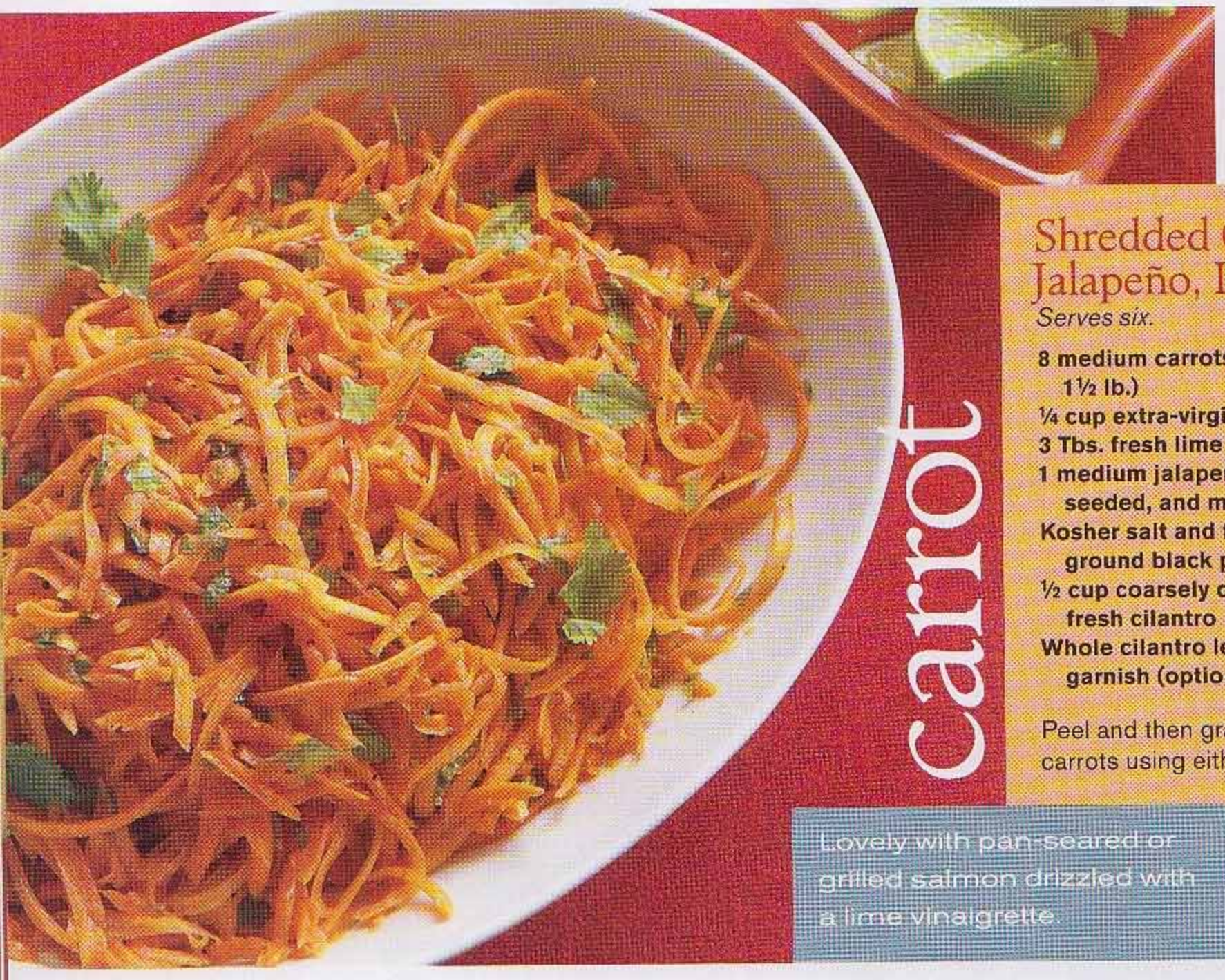
Serves eight.

3 small zucchini (about 1 lb.)
3 small yellow summer squash (about 1 lb.)
1 large daikon radish (about ½ lb.)
20 medium basil leaves, very thinly sliced
2 tsp. chopped fresh oregano
6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Small basil leaves for garnish (optional)

Trim the ends of the zucchini and yellow summer squash. With a vegetable peeler, shave the zucchini lengthwise into long, wide strips about 1/16 inch thick. When you get to the center of the zucchini, where the seeds are, turn it over and slice from the other side until you get to the center again. Discard the center. Put the zucchini ribbons in a large bowl. Slice the yellow squash using the same technique and add them to the zucchini. Peel off and discard the rough exterior peel of the daikon and then shave the daikon as you did the squash. Add the strips to the bowl with the squash, along with the basil and oregano.

In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil, lemon juice, and lemon zest. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss the vegetables with enough of the vinaigrette to lightly coat them (you may not need all of the vinaigrette) and season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve immediately, garnished with the small basil leaves (if using).

Delicious with grilled chicken, onion, and red bell pepper kebabs.



carrot

Shredded Carrots with Jalapeño, Lime & Cilantro

Serves six.

8 medium carrots (about 1½ lb.)
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 Tbs. fresh lime juice
1 medium jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
Whole cilantro leaves for garnish (optional)

Peel and then grate the carrots using either the large holes on a box grater or a food processor fitted with a medium grating attachment. Put the grated carrots in a large bowl.

In a small bowl, whisk the oil and lime juice. Add the jalapeño and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Add the dressing and chopped cilantro to the carrots and toss. Season to taste with salt and pepper, garnish with the cilantro leaves (if using), and serve.

Lovely with pan-seared or grilled salmon drizzled with a lime vinaigrette.

Spicy Slaw with Radicchio & Green Mango

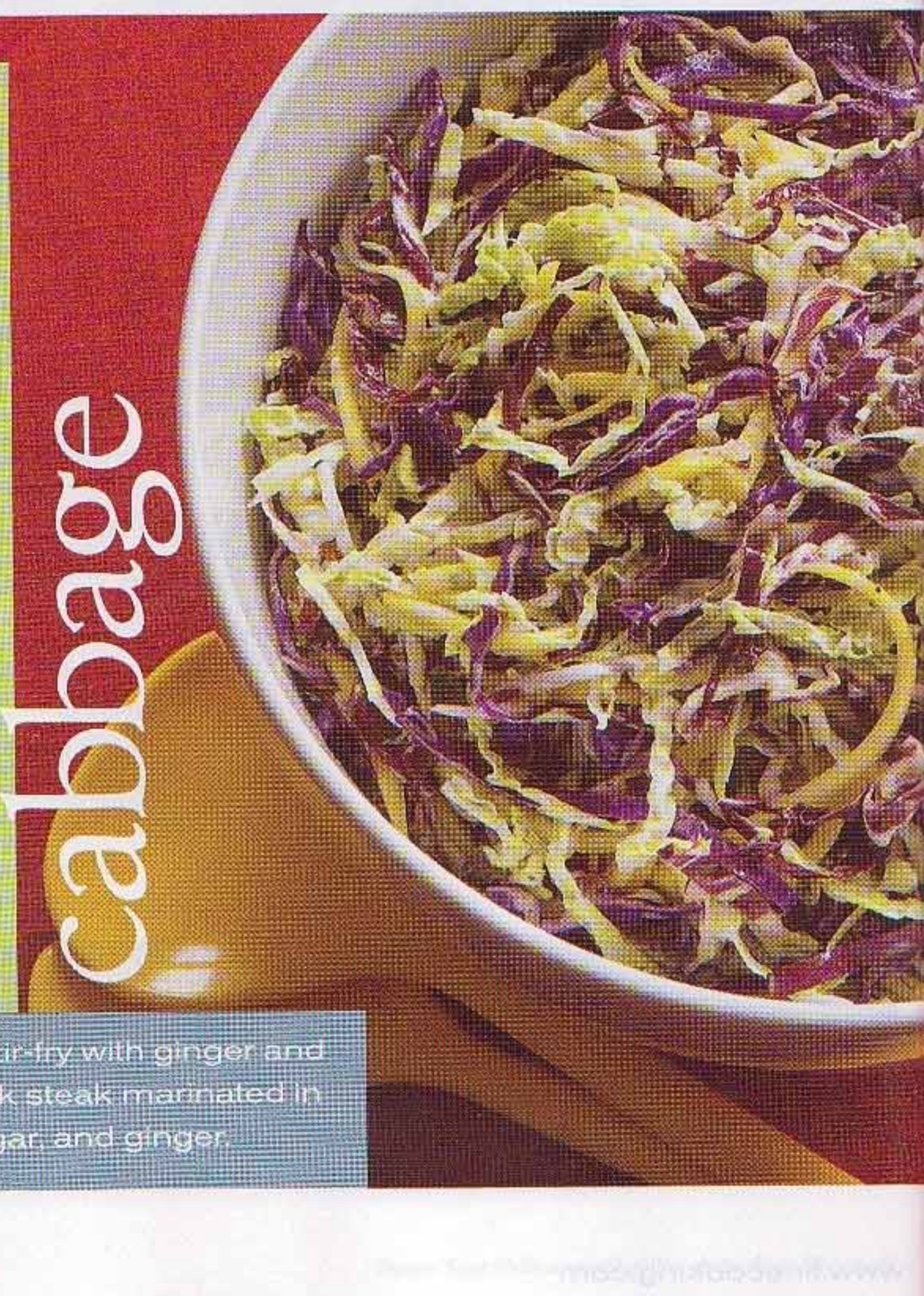
Serves six to eight.

If you like crunchy slaw, serve this right away. If you prefer a softer cabbage texture, let the slaw rest for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

2½ Tbs. rice vinegar
2 Tbs. mayonnaise
1½ Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. soy sauce
1 Tbs. granulated sugar
1 Tbs. peeled and finely grated fresh ginger
1 serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2½ cups thinly sliced radicchio (about one-half head)
2½ cups thinly sliced Savoy cabbage (about one-quarter head)
2 cups thinly sliced red cabbage (about one-quarter small head)
1 heaping cup matchstick-cut green (unripe) mango (about one-half mango; see From our Test Kitchen, p. 74)
2 medium scallions (white and light-green parts only), thinly sliced on the diagonal

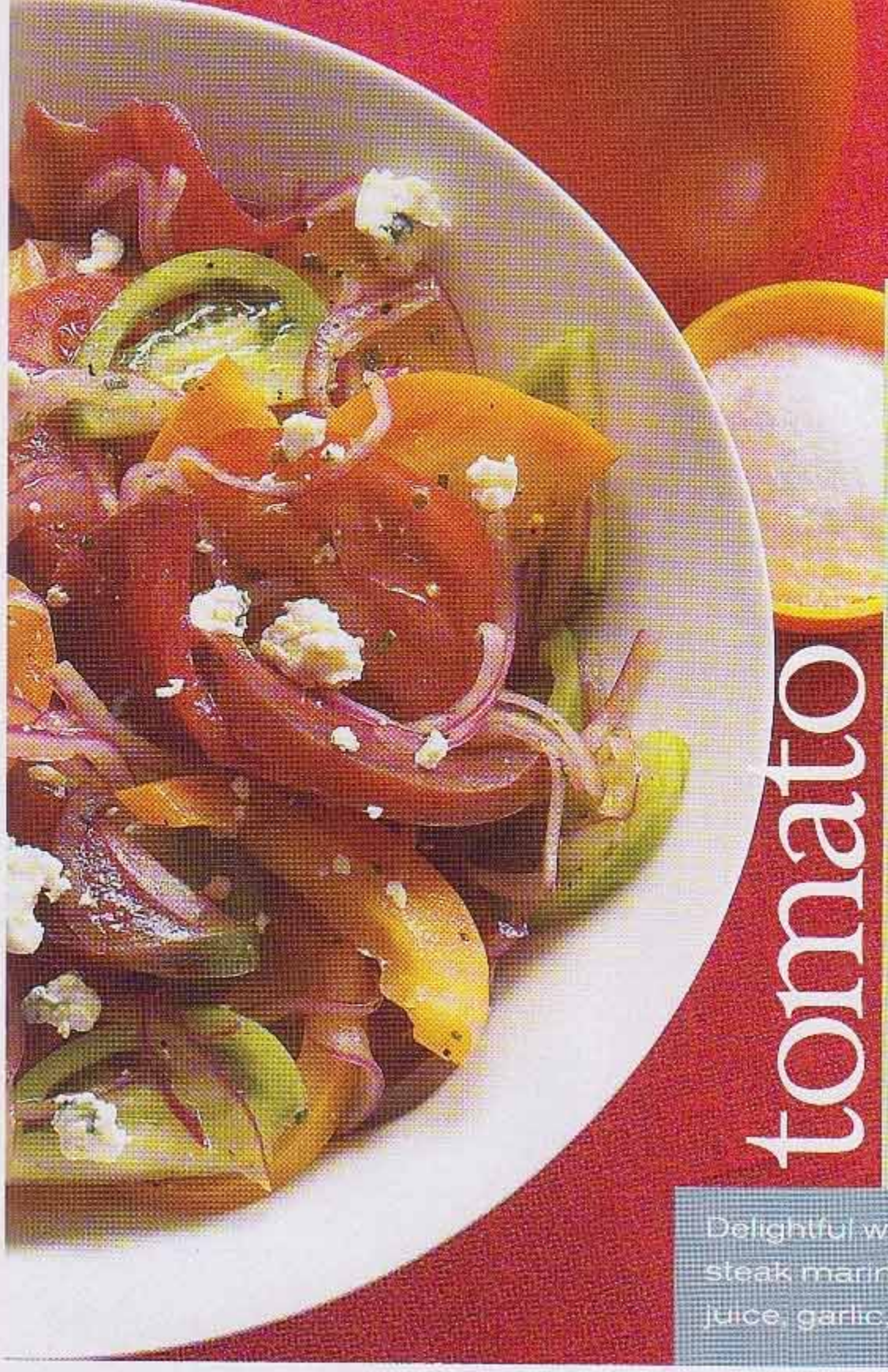
In a small bowl, whisk the vinegar, mayonnaise, olive oil, soy sauce, sugar, ginger, and serrano. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Put the radicchio, both types of cabbage, mango, and scallions in a large bowl. Add the dressing and toss. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve.



cabbage

Perfect with a pork stir-fry with ginger and garlic or a grilled flank steak marinated in soy sauce, rice vinegar, and ginger.



Marinated Tomatoes with Pickled Red Onions & Gorgonzola

Serves eight.

1½ cups red-wine vinegar
Kosher salt
1 small red onion (about 6 oz.), peeled, halved, and very thinly sliced crosswise
¼ cup thinly sliced chives
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
Freshly ground black pepper
2 lb. ripe tomatoes, preferably heirlooms of various colors (3 or 4 medium-large)
3 oz. Gorgonzola dolce or other blue cheese, crumbled (¾ cup)

In a medium bowl, stir the red-wine vinegar with 1½ tsp. salt until it has dissolved. Add the onion. If the vinegar doesn't cover the onion, add water to cover. Let sit for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk the chives, olive oil, and balsamic vinegar. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Core and cut the tomatoes in half lengthwise and then cut each half lengthwise into ¼-inch-thick slices. Put the tomatoes in a wide serving bowl. Pour the vinaigrette over the tomatoes and marinate them for 15 minutes.

Drain the onions, pressing them lightly to squeeze out any extra vinegar. Rinse the onions quickly and then lightly squeeze again. Add the onions to the tomatoes and toss. Season to taste with salt and pepper, top with the Gorgonzola, and serve.

Delightful with grilled rib-eye or flank steak marinated in olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, and rosemary or oregano.

Cucumber & Feta Toss with Mint & Dill

Serves six.

2 medium seedless English cucumbers (about 1½ lb.)
4 oz. feta, crumbled (scant 1 cup)
One-half medium sweet onion (such as Vidalia, Maui, or Walla Walla), sliced lengthwise as thinly as possible
¼ cup chopped fresh mint
¼ cup chopped fresh dill
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Mint leaves for garnish (optional)

Trim the ends of the cucumbers. With a vegetable peeler, peel them in ½-inch intervals, leaving ½-inch strips of peel intact. Halve the cucumbers lengthwise, scoop out and discard the core, and then cut them into ¾-inch dice.

In a large bowl, combine the cucumbers, feta, onion, mint, and dill.

In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil and lemon juice and season to taste with salt and pepper. Gently toss the dressing with the cucumber mixture. Season to taste with salt and pepper, garnish with the mint leaves (if using), and serve.

Nice with broiled or grilled lamb chops rubbed with cumin, cinnamon, coriander, and a little olive oil and lime juice.

Joanne Weir is a cooking teacher, cookbook author, and the host of a PBS show. ◆

Baked Beans Are Back

Bold flavors give a sophisticated spin to this summer classic

BY ALLISON EHRI KREITLER

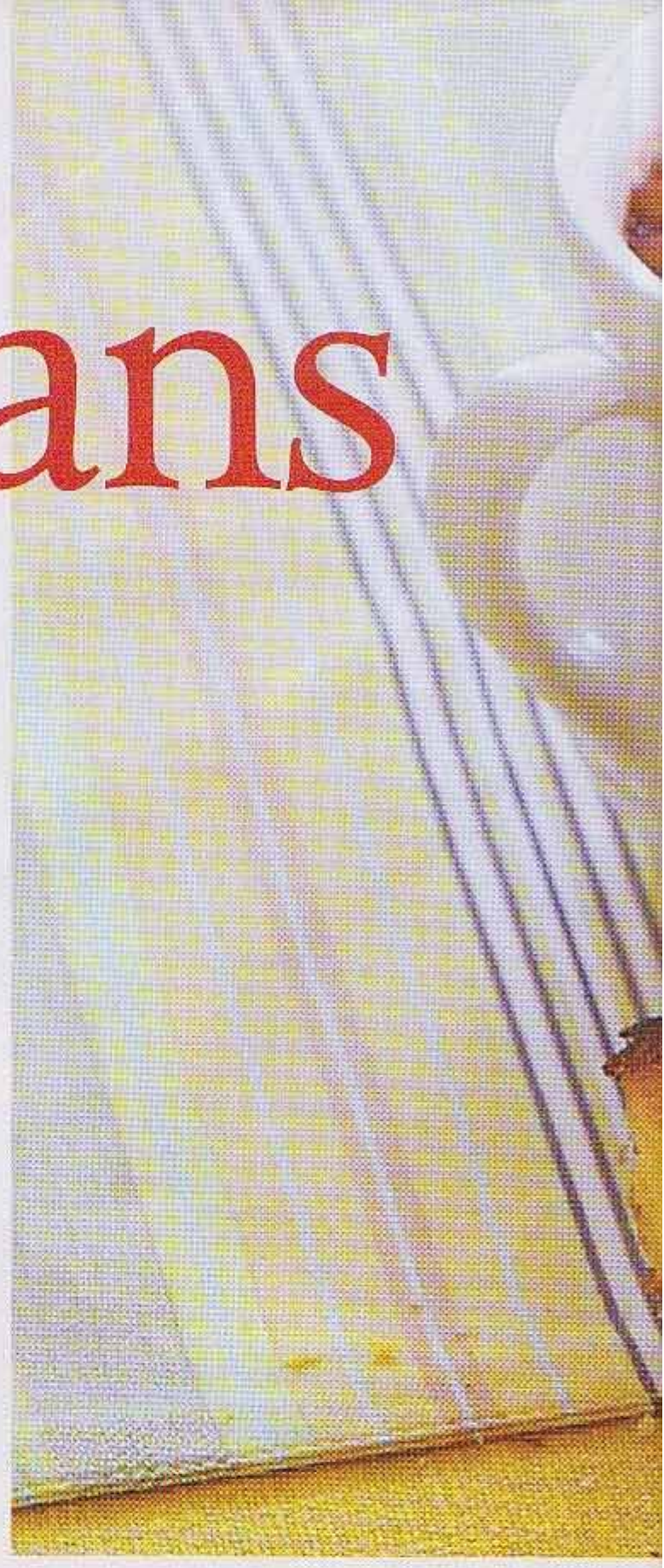
A few years ago, my opinion of baked beans changed forever when I tasted my friend Mory's homemade baked beans with tamarind and smoked turkey. Up until then, I'd never liked them. I admit my experience was mostly limited to the canned variety—cloyingly sweet, with not nearly enough pork to suit me. But Mory's were fantastic. They were not too sweet and were slightly sour from the tamarind, with lots of smoky shredded turkey for heft. They inspired me to develop my own life-altering baked bean recipes. I am happy to share them with you, as well as a few tricks I picked up along the way.

Combinations of sweet, tangy, and even bitter notes strike the right balance of flavor. If you keep the sweetness in check and the other flavors—smokiness, tang, and a touch of bitterness—well balanced, then your baked beans will be deliciously complex. The extra ingredients you add to your beans make all the difference. For tang and brightness, I turn to coffee, hard cider, Granny Smith apples, and sherry. For sweet touches, I stick with the traditional molasses, ketchup, maple syrup, and brown sugar.

Add plenty of meat—preferably some kind of cured pork—for hearty baked beans that are full of rich flavor. The smokiness of real Spanish chorizo, thick-cut bacon, or ham hocks adds a whole new dimension of flavor as well as a satisfying meatiness. And the salty pork cuts through the starchiness of the beans beautifully.

My method for these recipes is straightforward and relatively hands-off; you can go about your business while the beans bake. After soaking the dried beans to begin softening their skins, I brown the pork and sauté the aromatics in the pork drippings. Then I add spices, a cooking liquid, and the beans. Sweet ingredients and acids, such as coffee, tomatoes, and sherry, affect the way beans cook, so I don't add them until the beans are almost fully cooked. Once those ingredients are incorporated, I bake the beans uncovered so the cooking liquid can begin to reduce and intensify.

Time is a bean's best friend. Beans are like sponges, ready to soak up lots of good flavor if you give them enough time. After baking them, I let the beans sit overnight to absorb all the different flavors I've added and to let their natural starches begin to thicken the sauce. Then I reheat the beans on the stovetop and simmer them until the sauce thickens and coats the beans nicely. Finally, I like to add an optional—but highly recommended—dash of cider vinegar, sherry, or bourbon for a burst of bright flavor.



Sherry Baked Beans with Chorizo

Yields about 2 quarts; serves eight to ten.

Sherry adds a subtle tang, and Spanish chorizo brings a smoky note to these beans.

1 lb. dried navy beans
1 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
10 oz. Spanish chorizo, casings removed (if possible), small diced (about 2 cups)
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
3 large cloves garlic, chopped
6 cups lower-salt chicken broth
2 bay leaves
½ tsp. ground cumin
⅛ tsp. cinnamon
Freshly ground black pepper
1 cup oloroso or amontillado sherry, plus 2 Tbs. to finish, if desired
1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
¼ cup light brown sugar
3 sprigs fresh thyme
Kosher salt

Photos: Scott Phillips

Sort through the beans to make sure there are no little stones and then put them in a large bowl or pot. Add enough cold water to cover the beans by 2 inches and let soak overnight. Alternatively, put the beans in a 4-quart saucepan. Add enough cold water to cover by 2 inches and bring just to a boil. Remove from the heat and soak for 2 hours. Drain the beans well, tilting the colander instead of shaking it to gently extract the water and protect the beans' skins.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F.

Heat the olive oil in a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chorizo and cook, stirring occasionally, until nicely browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer with a slotted spoon to a small bowl. Depending on the amount of fat left in the pot, pour off and discard all but 3 Tbs. or add enough olive oil to make 3 Tbs. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 5 to 7 minutes.

Add the broth, bay leaves, cumin, cinnamon, and ½ tsp. pepper. Stir to combine. Add the beans and bring just to a simmer over high heat. Cover and bake until the beans are easy to bite into but still a little mealy in texture, 45 to 60 minutes.

Stir in the reserved chorizo, 1 cup sherry, and the tomatoes, brown sugar, and thyme. Bake, uncovered, until the beans are fully tender, 30 to 60 minutes more. Cool to room temperature, remove the bay leaves and thyme stems, cover, and refrigerate overnight.

To finish, bring to a simmer, uncovered, over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and continue to simmer until the sauce is reduced to the consistency of thin gravy, stirring occasionally so the bottom doesn't burn, 40 to 60 minutes. Stir in the remaining 2 Tbs. sherry (if using) and season the beans to taste with salt and pepper.

reader review

A *Fine Cooking* reader gave the Sherry Baked Beans with Chorizo a real-world test. Here are the results:

This recipe was easy to prepare, and my whole family loved it. My husband especially liked the addition of the smoky Spanish chorizo, and my 2-year-old daughter ate some and then asked for more. The chorizo and sherry added an upscale and international element that we really enjoyed, but it still tasted similar to more conventional baked beans. It would be a great side dish for both gourmet and traditional palates. I served the beans with garlic and sherry shrimp, following the Spanish theme, and crusty peasant bread for soaking up the delicious sauce.

—Jenny Saavedra
Centennial, Colorado

Beans are like sponges, ready to soak up lots of good flavor if you give them enough time.

Spicy Red-Eye Baked Beans

Yields about 2 quarts; serves eight to ten.

The addition of the coffee, for which the recipe is named, deepens the other flavors in the beans.

1 lb. dried pinto beans
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 medium onion, chopped
2 large cloves garlic, chopped
1 Tbs. ancho chile powder
1 tsp. chipotle chile powder
1 tsp. ground cumin
¼ tsp. ground allspice
Freshly ground black pepper
6 cups lower-salt beef broth
1 meaty smoked ham hock (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74)
1 cup brewed coffee
⅓ cup mild molasses, such as Grandma's Original
⅓ cup ketchup
1 Tbs. Worcestershire sauce
2 sprigs fresh oregano
1 Tbs. bourbon (optional)
Kosher salt

Sort through the beans to make sure there are no little stones and then put them in a large bowl or pot. Add enough cold water to cover the beans by 2 inches and let soak overnight. Alternatively, put the beans in a 4-quart saucepan. Add enough cold water to cover by 2 inches and bring just to a boil. Remove from the heat and soak for 2 hours. Drain the beans well, tilting the colander instead of shaking it to gently extract the water and protect the beans' skins.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F.

Melt the butter in a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 5 to 7 minutes.

Add the chile powders, cumin, allspice, and ½ tsp. pepper. Cook, stirring, until aromatic, about 30 seconds. Add the broth and ham hock. Stir to combine. Add the beans and bring just to a simmer. Cover and bake until the beans are easy to bite into but still a little mealy in texture, 45 to 60 minutes.

Stir in the coffee, molasses, ketchup, Worcestershire, and oregano. Bake, uncovered, until the beans are fully tender, 30 to 60 minutes more. Cool to room temperature. Discard the oregano stems and the skin from the ham hock. Cut the meat off the bone and chop. Add the meat to the beans and discard the bone. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

To finish, bring to a simmer, uncovered, over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and continue to simmer until the sauce is reduced to the consistency of thin gravy, stirring occasionally so the bottom doesn't burn, 40 to 60 minutes. Stir in the bourbon (if using) and season the beans to taste with salt and pepper.

Tips for better baked beans

Soak for soft skins. Soaking dried beans overnight yields consistently tender cooked beans. If you're rushed, though, the quick-soak method outlined in these recipes works well, too.

Be gentle. To keep the beans' skins intact so they hold their shape throughout the baking process, resist the temptation to stir too often. And during the final cooking stage, don't try to rush things by boiling or simmering too vigorously.

Taste five beans when checking for doneness. Beans cook at different rates, even in the same pot, so it's best to try a few at a time. Test frequently, as cooking times vary.

Be patient. Baked beans act like sponges, so let the finished beans sit overnight to absorb as much flavor as possible.

These beans are undercooked and still mealy.

These beans are fully cooked and tender all the way through.

These beans are overcooked and mushy, with split skins.

Cider & Bacon Baked Beans

Yields about 2 quarts; serves eight to ten.

These slightly sweet and savory beans are great with sausages or roast pork.

1 lb. dried Great Northern beans
10 oz. thick-cut bacon, medium diced (8 slices)
1 medium onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
6 cups lower-salt chicken broth
1½ Tbs. dry mustard
¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
⅛ tsp. ground cloves
Freshly ground black pepper
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and small diced (7½ oz.)
1 cup hard apple cider
¼ cup pure maple syrup
¼ cup ketchup
2 sprigs fresh marjoram
2 tsp. cider vinegar (optional)
Kosher salt

Sort through the beans to make sure there are no little stones and then put them in a large bowl or pot. Add enough cold water to cover the beans by 2 inches and let soak overnight. Alternatively, put the beans in a 4-quart saucepan. Add enough cold water to cover by 2 inches and bring just to a boil. Remove from the heat and soak for 2 hours. Drain the beans well, tilting the colander instead of shaking it to gently extract the water and protect the beans' skins.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F.

Cook the bacon in a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 8 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and with a slotted spoon transfer the bacon to a small bowl. Pour off and discard all but 3 Tbs. of the fat.

Set the pot over medium heat and add the onion and garlic. Cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and golden, about 7 minutes. Add the broth, mustard, nutmeg, cloves, and 1 tsp. pepper. Stir to combine. Add the beans and bring just to a simmer over medium-high heat. Cover and bake until the beans are easy to bite into but still a little mealy in texture, 45 to 60 minutes.

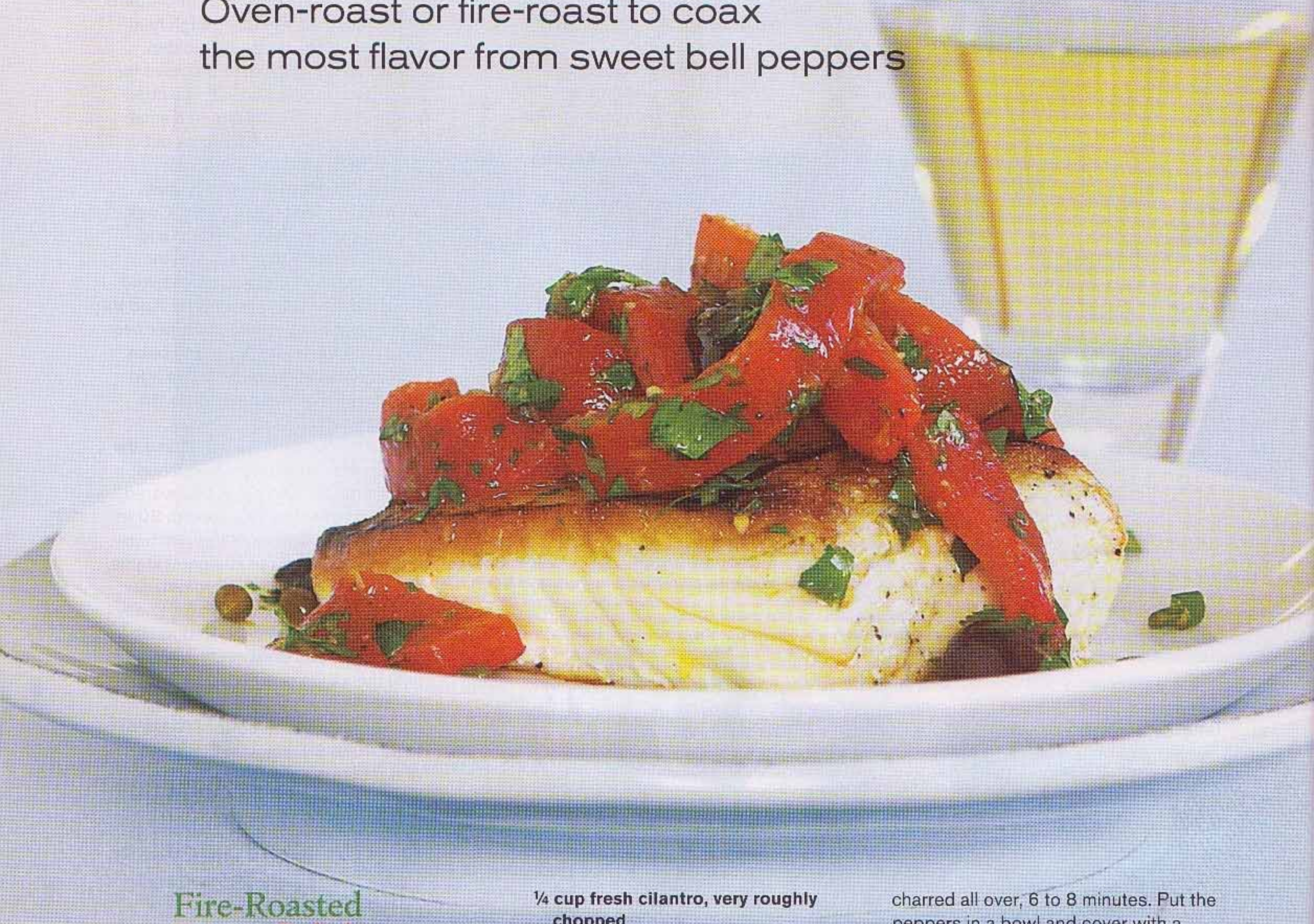
Stir in the reserved bacon and the apple, cider, maple syrup, ketchup, and marjoram, and bake, uncovered, until the beans are fully tender, 30 to 60 minutes more. Cool to room temperature, remove the marjoram stems, cover, and refrigerate overnight.

To finish, bring to a simmer, uncovered, over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and continue to simmer until the sauce is reduced to the consistency of thin gravy, stirring occasionally so the bottom doesn't burn, 40 to 60 minutes. Stir in the vinegar (if using) and season the beans to taste with salt and pepper.

Allison Ehri Kreitler is Fine Cooking's *test kitchen associate and food stylist.* ◆

Two Ways to

Oven-roast or fire-roast to coax
the most flavor from sweet bell peppers



Fire-Roasted Pepper Relish

Yields about 2 cups.

I like to serve this simple relish on top of a grilled steak, chicken breast, or fish fillet such as halibut or swordfish. The recipe calls for both parsley and cilantro but feel free to use other herbs like sliced chives or chopped basil.

3 red or orange bell peppers
¼ cup pitted Niçoise or Kalamata olives, halved
¼ cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, very roughly chopped
¼ cup fresh cilantro, very roughly chopped
2 Tbs. thinly sliced scallions
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. capers, rinsed
½ tsp. minced garlic
½ tsp. minced jalapeño or serrano
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon plus a squeeze of lemon juice
Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Prepare a hot gas or charcoal grill fire. Cut the tops and bottoms from the peppers and cut the peppers into 3 or 4 flat pieces, discarding the tops, seeds, and ribs. Grill the pepper sides and bottoms skin side down until blistered and charred all over, 6 to 8 minutes. Put the peppers in a bowl and cover with a plate. Let sit until cool enough to handle. Peel the charred skin and discard. Don't be too concerned if flecks of skin remain attached. Cut the peppers into bite-size pieces or wide strips.

Put the pepper pieces in a medium bowl and add the remaining ingredients, stirring well and seasoning to taste with lemon juice, salt, and pepper.

Make ahead: The relish keeps well in the refrigerator in a sealed container for at least a week. It's best to make it a couple of hours ahead to allow the flavors to develop.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Roast a Pepper

BY ANNIE WAYTE

I grew up in England, where bell peppers were considered exotic in the late 1970s. The only time we saw them was as a fancy garnish. For family buffets, I remember my grandmother ornamenting her rice salad with bright red bell pepper rings and decking out the tuna fish pâté with a flower motif made from green bell pepper strips, neatly cut red pepper diamonds, and sliced hard boiled eggs. Even today, you typically find raw bell peppers tossed into salads, scattered over pizzas, or skewered between cubes of meat and onion.

But raw peppers lack the deliciously sweet flavor that comes from cooking them until their flesh begins to collapse and their juices concentrate. I rely on two simple methods to bring out the deep, rich flavor and soft texture of bell peppers, making them far more versatile than when they're left raw. Rather than standing out as a crisp and sharp garnish, roasted peppers enhance and marry well with the vegetables and herbs available at this time of year.

My first method is to slow-roast bell peppers in the oven, which allows their sharpness to fade and their natural sugars to intensify. I simply put the peppers on a rimmed baking sheet and roast them in a 400°F oven, turning occasionally so they get browned all over. Because they cook for nearly an hour, the peppers lose all their crunch and develop a wonderful, velvety texture. The long cooking time allows the heat to coax out every bit of sweetness and results in soft and juicy pepper pieces that purée beautifully into a silky soup and melt into a creamy, savory tart.

My second method—roasting peppers over a flame—makes them intensely rich, sweet, and juicy. This is the quicker of the two cooking methods and results in a slightly firmer pepper, which is what you want to add body to pastas and side dishes like relishes. For this method, I like to grill peppers over a gas or charcoal grill, but you can also char them over the flame of a gas stove or under a broiler.

For both methods, it's necessary to remove the skin of the pepper after cooking. This is easiest if you let the peppers steam immediately after they are cooked. I put the grilled peppers in a bowl and cover with a plate, and I leave the oven-roasted peppers on the baking sheet and cover them with a dishtowel. The steam separates the skin from the softened pepper flesh. Once the peppers are cool, it's not hard to peel the thin skin off with your hands. (For more tips on handling roasted peppers, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74.)

So the next time you see a colorful array of bell peppers in the market, grab a few and oven- or fire-roast them. Then make the most of the bright, sweet flavor of your roasted peppers by trying one of the recipes here.

Oven-roasted peppers develop a soft and silky texture and intensified sweetness.

Fire-roasted peppers remain firmer than oven-roasted peppers and have a fruity, slightly smoky flavor.

What's in a color?

Many people don't realize that most bell peppers start out green and ripen to become red, orange, and yellow peppers. The longer the pepper ripens on the plant, the more the flavor mellows and the more sugar the vegetable develops, which explains why green bell peppers have a sharp and sometimes bitter flavor. The color the pepper turns when fully ripe depends on the variety.

Chilled Oven-Roasted Yellow Pepper Soup

Serves six.

8 yellow bell peppers
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling
1 large yellow onion, coarsely chopped
1 jalapeño, stemmed and seeded
1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary
2 cups lower-salt chicken broth
Generous pinch of granulated sugar
Kosher salt or fine sea salt and freshly ground pepper
¼ cup sliced fresh chives (¼ inch long)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Put the peppers on a rimmed baking sheet and roast in the oven, turning every 15 minutes, until browned and wrinkled all over, 45 to 60 minutes. Remove the peppers from the oven, cover with a dishtowel, and set aside to cool. Seed, peel, and cut the peppers into quarters.

Heat the oil in a 4-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, jalapeño, and rosemary and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion starts to brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the peppers and any accumulated juices, broth, sugar, 1½ tsp. salt, ¼ tsp. black pepper, and 1½ cups water. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, cover, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for 5 minutes to blend the flavors. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

Purée the soup in batches in a blender or food processor. Strain the purée through a fine sieve into a bowl, using a ladle to push as many of the solids through as possible. Discard the solids in the sieve and refrigerate the soup for at least 3 hours or overnight.

Once chilled, season the soup to taste with salt and pepper. Serve in chilled bowls, sprinkled with the chives. Finish each serving with a drizzle of olive oil.

Oven-Roasted Pepper Tart with Prosciutto & Goat Cheese

Serves six to eight.

FOR THE TART SHELL:
7 oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
½ tsp. kosher salt
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
1 large egg yolk

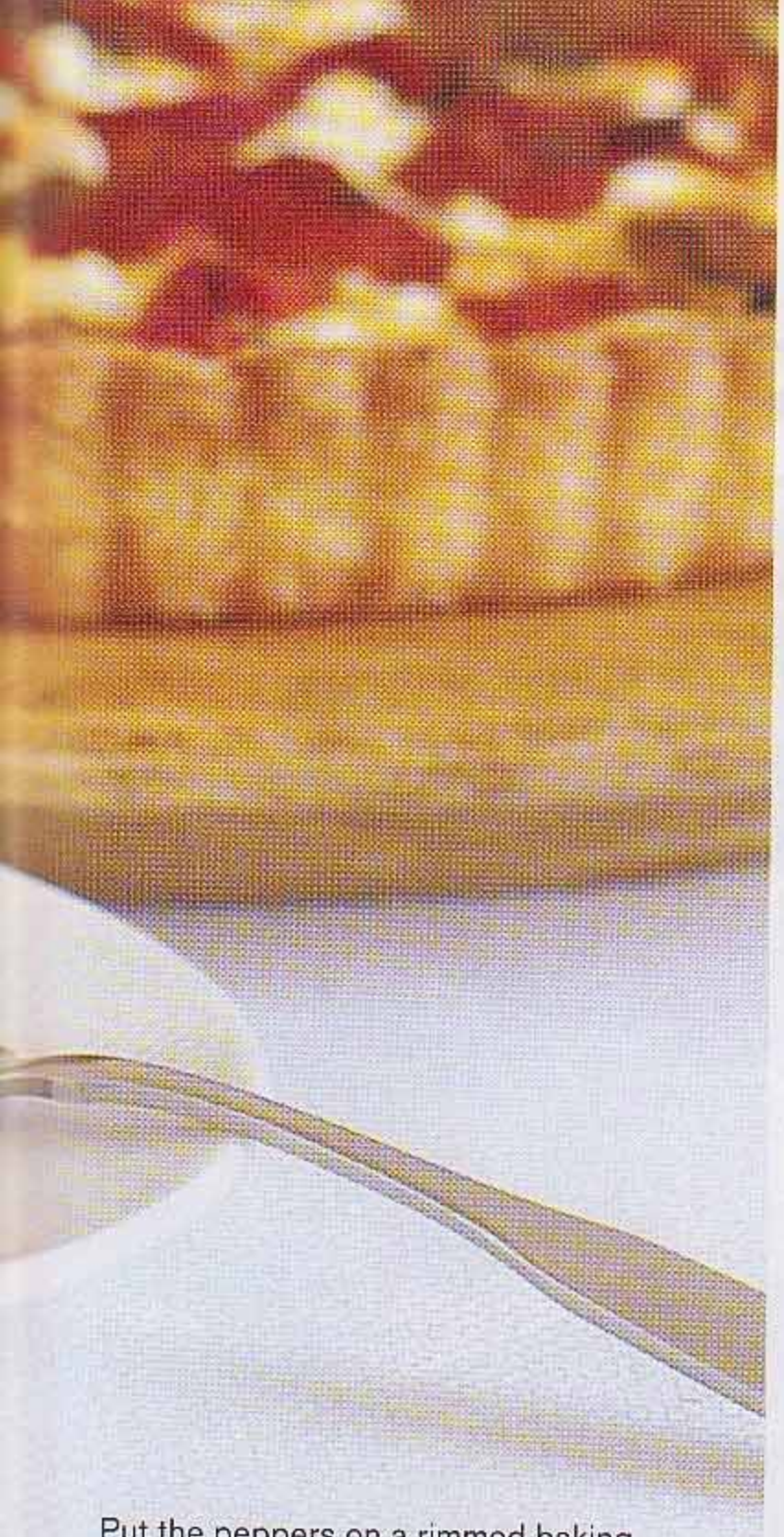
FOR THE FILLING:
2 medium red or orange bell peppers
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh thyme
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 cup heavy cream
2 eggs
2 thin slices prosciutto, cut in thin strips
6 large fresh basil leaves, chopped
1 Tbs. finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
⅓ cup crumbled goat cheese

Make the tart shell: In a large bowl mix the flour and salt. With a pastry blender, cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse, fresh breadcrumbs. In a small dish, lightly beat the egg yolk with 2 Tbs. cold water. Drizzle it over the flour mixture and stir with a fork until the egg is evenly distributed. With the fork, stir in 2 to 4 Tbs. cold water, 1 Tbs. at a time, until the dough starts gathering into clumps. If you press some of the dough between your fingers, it should hold together. Dump the dough onto a counter. Gently press and gather the dough together, shaping it into a disk. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill for at least 1 hour.

Roll the chilled dough on a lightly floured surface into a circle 3/16 inch thick and 12 to 13 inches in diameter. Drape the dough over your rolling pin and lift it over a 9½-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. Unroll the dough and gently press it into the pan without stretching it. Then pass the rolling pin over the rim to cut off the excess dough. Wrap and freeze for at least 30 minutes.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Line the chilled tart shell with foil and fill it with dried beans or pie weights. Let the excess foil stand straight up, rather than folding it over the edges of the pan. Bake until the pastry edges are light golden, about 30 minutes. Carefully remove the foil and weights. Bake until the base of the pastry is beginning to turn golden, about 10 minutes more. If the pastry puffed at all, gently press down the bubbles before cooling completely on a rack.

Make the filling: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F.



Put the peppers on a rimmed baking sheet and roast in the oven, turning every 15 minutes until browned and wrinkled all over, 45 to 60 minutes. Remove the peppers from the oven, cover with a dishtowel, and set aside to cool. Turn the oven down to 375°F.

Seed, peel, and cut the peppers into wide strips or bite-size pieces. Set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, half the thyme, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper and cook, stirring frequently, until the onions are very soft and golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low or low if it looks like they're burning. Set aside at room temperature to cool.

In a small bowl, whisk the cream, eggs, and ¼ tsp. each salt and pepper. In a medium bowl, mix the peppers, onions, prosciutto, basil, parmigiano, and remaining thyme.

Put the tart shell on a baking sheet. Distribute the pepper mixture in the tart shell and scatter the goat cheese over it. Slowly drizzle the egg mixture over the filling until it reaches the rim of the pastry (you may not need it all). Bake the tart until the custard is set, 30 to 35 minutes. Cool on a rack and serve warm or at room temperature.

Fire-Roasted Pepper & Shrimp Fettucine with Toasted Garlic Breadcrumbs

Serves four.

1 lb. large shrimp (31 to 40 per lb.)
4½ Tbs. olive oil
1 tsp. minced garlic
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground pepper
2 large red or orange bell peppers
½ cup fresh breadcrumbs
¾ lb. dried fettuccine
1 large shallot, finely diced (about ¼ cup)
2 oz. arugula leaves (about 2 lightly packed cups)
10 fresh basil leaves, coarsely chopped

Peel and devein the shrimp and then cut in half lengthwise. In a large bowl, combine the shrimp, 1 Tbs. of the oil, ½ tsp. of the garlic, the lemon zest, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper and toss to mix well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes and up to 8 hours.

Prepare a hot gas or charcoal grill fire. Cut the tops and bottoms from the peppers and cut the peppers into 3 or 4 flat pieces, discarding the tops, seeds, and ribs. Grill the pepper sides and bottoms skin side down until blistered and charred all over, 6 to 8 minutes. Put the peppers in a bowl and cover with a plate. Let sit until cool enough to handle. Peel the charred skin and discard. Don't be too concerned if flecks of skin remain attached. Cut the peppers into thin strips.

Heat 1½ Tbs. of the olive oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the breadcrumbs and the remaining ½ tsp. of garlic, and stir frequently until the smaller crumbs are golden brown and crisp, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from the heat, season with salt and pepper, and transfer to a small bowl. Carefully wipe out the pan with a paper towel.

Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil over high heat. Cook the fettuccine in the boiling water, stirring frequently at first, until al dente, about 11 minutes.

While the pasta is cooking, heat 1 Tbs. of the olive oil in the skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp and cook, stirring frequently, until curled and turning opaque, about 1 minute. Add the peppers and shallot and season with ½ tsp. each salt and pepper. Continue to cook, stirring, until the shrimp are mostly opaque, about 1 minute more. Ladle ¼ cup of the boiling pasta water into the skillet and cook until the shrimp are cooked through, about 1 more minute (be careful not to overcook).

Reserve another ¼ cup of the cooking water and drain the pasta. Return the pasta to the pot and add the shrimp mixture, the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil, the arugula, and the basil. Toss well and season to taste with more salt and pepper. If the pasta looks dry, add some of the reserved pasta water. Divide among 4 warm serving bowls and sprinkle with the toasted breadcrumbs.

Annie Wayte is the chef at New York City's 202 and London's Nicole. ◆

Small Plates Perfect for Entertaining

Move over, tapas, and make room for *meze*—these tasty Greek nibbles are the ideal party food

BY SUSANNA HOFFMAN

When I first stepped into a little Greek village some thirty years ago, I wasn't yet aware that each custom I learned would come accompanied by a meatball, each tradition wrapped in phyllo, each conversation moderated with hummus, and each argument made zesty with cucumber-yogurt dip.

I had entered the land of *mezedes* or *meze*, the legendary small plates of Greece. Like tapas, their Spanish cousins, *meze* (meh-ZAY) are not appetizers in the first-course sense. Rather, they're tidbits offered in a variety of settings, from sunset confabs to late-night gatherings in a café or around a kitchen table—and they're always, always served at parties. This culinary custom derives from the ancient Greeks, who believed that no guest should be welcomed and no drinks should be served without a nibble. Three thousand years and many treats later, these Greek small plates remain, to my mind, the perfect party food, and I turn to them every time I entertain. They're so versatile, you can make just one or two as cocktail noshes or, even better, serve up a *meze* spread and make it the center of the party—that's what I do.

Here, I'm offering what I consider to be the backbone of any *meze* spread. They're classic dishes that you'll find all over Greece, from chickpea, eggplant, and tangy yogurt dips to spinach and feta phyllo pie (*spanakopita*), crisp lamb meatballs, zucchini fritters, and stuffed grape leaves. As with all Greek food, the wonderful thing about *meze* is the freshness of their ingredients, which include an abundance of herbs and olive oil, and the variety of flavors, from earthy and meaty to zesty and sweet.

If you decide to follow my lead and prepare a *meze* spread for your next party, I've made things a little easier for you by putting together a timeline (see p. 65) that'll help you get organized and spread the work over a couple of days. Most of these dishes are served just barely warm or at room temperature, so there's very little last-minute fussing over the stove. Since you'll be doing most of the prep work ahead, you'll have plenty of time to enjoy your guests *and* your delicious Greek treats.

Working with phyllo

Phyllo dries out very fast and becomes brittle when exposed to the air. When Susanna Hoffman makes spanakopita, she works quickly, oiling each phyllo sheet directly on the stack without ever covering it. However, cooks with less experience in working with phyllo may want to oil one sheet at a time on a countertop, keeping the phyllo stack covered with plastic wrap topped with a slightly damp towel (the towel keeps the plastic weighted down). This will prevent the stacked phyllo sheets from drying out. Just fold back the towel and plastic each time you need a new sheet.

Greek Spinach & Feta Pie (*Spanakopita*)

Yields one 9x13x2-inch pie; serves eight.

Spanakopita can also be made with other greens, such as dandelion or chard, in place of spinach. You can use 1 lb. frozen chopped spinach instead of fresh. Thaw the spinach overnight or in a colander under warm running water. Squeeze out the liquid and skip the pan-wilting step.

FOR THE FILLING:

2 lb. fresh spinach, washed, dried, trimmed, and coarsely chopped
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 bunch scallions (about 3 oz. or 10 small), white and light-green parts only, trimmed and finely chopped
2 cups crumbled feta cheese (10 oz.)
½ cup finely grated Greek kefalotyri cheese (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74) or Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
½ cup finely chopped fresh dill

Photos: Scott Phillips

A *meze* party

Greek Spinach & Feta Pie

❖

Cucumber-Yogurt Dip

❖

Hummus with Tahini

❖

Toasted Pita Chips

❖

Rustic Eggplant Dip

❖

Pine Nut, Currant & Rice-Stuffed Grape Leaves

❖

Crisp Lamb Meatballs

❖

Zucchini Fritters

⅓ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
Kosher or fine sea salt

FOR THE ASSEMBLY:
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil for brushing; more as needed
Eighteen 9x14-inch sheets frozen phyllo dough (I use Athens brand), thawed and at room temperature
2 tsp. whole milk

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F.

Make the filling: Heat a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add a few large handfuls of the spinach and cook, tossing gently with tongs. As the spinach starts to wilt, add the rest a few handfuls at a time. Cook until all the spinach is wilted and bright green, about 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the spinach to a colander set in a sink. Let cool slightly and squeeze with your hands to extract as much of the remaining liquid as you can.

Wipe the pan dry with a paper towel. Heat the oil in the pan over medium heat. Add the scallions and cook until soft and fragrant, about 4 minutes. Stir in the spinach, turn off the heat, and let cool for 5 minutes. Then stir in the cheeses, eggs, dill, parsley, nutmeg, and ½ tsp. salt and mix thoroughly.

Assemble the pie: With a pastry brush, lightly coat the bottom and sides of a 9x13x2-inch baking pan with some of the oil. Working quickly, lightly oil one side of a phyllo sheet and lay it in the pan oiled side up and off center so that it partially covers the bottom and reaches halfway up one long side of the pan (the edge on the bottom of the pan will be about 1 inch from the side). Lightly oil the top of another phyllo sheet and lay it oiled side up and off center so it reaches halfway up the other long side of the pan. (If your pan has sloped sides, the sheets may be slightly longer than the bottom of the pan; if so, let the excess go up one short side of the pan and then alternate with subsequent sheets.) Repeat this pattern with 4 more phyllo sheets.

Next, lightly oil the tops of 3 phyllo sheets and layer them oiled side up and centered in the pan. Spread the filling evenly over the last layer.

Repeat the oiling and layering of the remaining 9 phyllo sheets over the filling in the same way you layered the previous 9. With the oiled bristles of the pastry brush, push the edges of the phyllo down around the sides of the pan to enclose the filling completely.

With a sharp knife, score the top phyllo layer into 24 rectangles, being careful not to cut all the way through to the filling. Using the same pastry brush, brush the milk along all the score marks (this will keep the phyllo from flaking up along the edges of the squares). Bake the spanakopita until the top crust is golden brown, 35 to 45 minutes. Let cool until just warm. Cut out the rectangles carefully along the score marks and serve.

Make ahead: You can make the pie up to 4 hours ahead. Keep warm, if desired, or serve at room temperature.

Hummus with Tahini
(*Xoumas me Taxini*)

Yields about 2 cups; serves eight to ten.

Greek hummus, a dip that dates back to ancient Greece, is very similar to other Near Eastern versions, such as Lebanese or Turkish hummus, some of which can be a bit spicier.

15½-oz. can chick peas (1½ cups), rinsed and drained
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste
1½ Tbs. tahini (sesame paste)
2 medium cloves garlic, peeled
½ tsp. ground coriander
½ tsp. ground cumin
Kosher or sea salt

Purée the chick peas, olive oil, lemon juice, tahini, garlic, coriander, cumin, ½ tsp. salt, and ⅓ cup cold water in a food processor until smooth. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving. Season to taste with more lemon juice and salt just before serving. Serve cool or at room temperature accompanied by fresh pita wedges or toasted pita chips (see recipe at right).

Make ahead: The hummus can be made a day ahead.

Cucumber-Yogurt Dip
(*Tzatziki*)

Yields about 2 cups; serves eight to ten.

Aside from being a great party dip, tzatziki is also delicious served with roasted or grilled meats, or with the lamb meatballs on p. 67. Chopping the garlic in the salt is a Greek trick that brings out garlic's punch. Raw garlic, however, becomes acrid rather quickly so to be at its best, tzatziki should be made the day of serving or no more than 24 hours ahead.

Kosher or sea salt
2 medium cloves garlic
1½ cups plain whole-milk yogurt, preferably Greek
¾ cup peeled, seeded, and finely chopped cucumber
1 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
2 tsp. chopped fresh mint
2 tsp. chopped fresh dill
2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
Fresh mint leaves for garnish (optional)

Spread ¾ tsp. salt on a cutting board. Peel the garlic and finely chop it on top of the salt. Transfer the garlic and salt to a medium bowl and stir in the yogurt.

Put the cucumber in a colander and squeeze as much liquid out of it as you can. Add the cucumber, vinegar, mint, dill, and olive oil to the yogurt mixture. Stir to blend and season to taste with salt. Cover and chill for at least 4 hours before serving. Serve cool, garnished with the mint leaves (if using) and accompanied by fresh pita wedges or toasted pita chips (see recipe at right).

Make ahead: The dip can be made up to a day ahead.

Toasted Pita Chips

Yields about 160 chips.

You'll need to bake the chips in two or more batches. If baking two sheets at a time, swap the sheets' positions after 5 minutes.

Ten 6- to 7-inch round pocket pita breads
5 to 6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more to taste
Kosher or sea salt

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F.

Split each pita into two rounds. Lightly brush each round on both sides with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Cut each round into 8 wedges and arrange in a single layer on rimmed baking sheets. Bake until golden and crisp, about 12 minutes.

Serve warm or at room temperature.

Make ahead: The chips can be made up to 2 days ahead and stored in an air-tight container. Re-crisp just before serving in a 250°F oven for about 8 minutes.

Note: To learn how to make homemade pita, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74.

Rustic Eggplant Dip
(*Melanzanosalata*)

Yields about 2 cups; serves eight to ten.

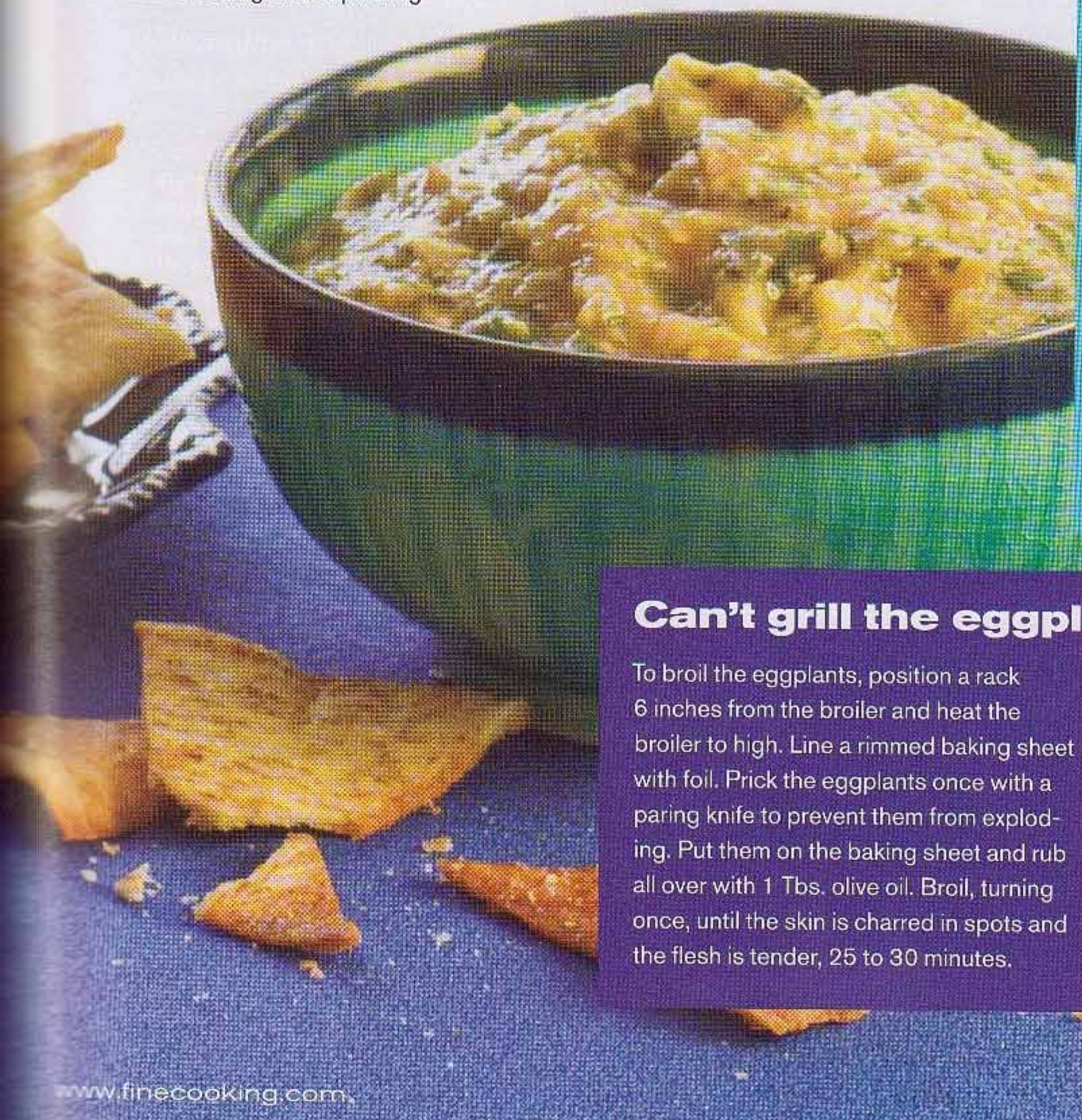
Grilling the eggplant adds a wonderful smoky flavor. But broiling or roasting it (see sidebar below) makes a dip that's just as delicious.

2 small eggplants (1½ lb. total)
1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
¼ cup seeded and finely diced fresh tomato
2 Tbs. minced yellow onion
1½ tsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. red-wine vinegar
½ tsp. chopped fresh oregano or marjoram
½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme
½ tsp. chopped fresh mint
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Prepare a medium gas or charcoal grill fire (charcoal will give a smokier flavor). Prick the eggplants once with the tip of a paring knife to prevent them from swelling and exploding and rub all over with 1 Tbs. of the oil. Grill, covered but turning every few minutes, until the eggplants are very soft inside and the skins are charred, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool.

Cut the stems off the eggplants and peel away the charred skin; discard the stems and skin. Coarsely chop the flesh and transfer it to a medium bowl. Add the remaining 1 tsp. oil and the tomato, onion, parsley, lemon juice, vinegar, oregano or marjoram, thyme, mint, 1 tsp. salt, and ⅛ tsp. pepper. Mix well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours before serving. Season to taste with more salt. Serve cool or at room temperature with fresh pita wedges or toasted pita chips (see recipe at left).

Make ahead: The eggplant can be broiled several hours or up to 2 days before making the salad. For best flavor, make the dip a day ahead.



Make-ahead plan for a party

This timeline will help you put together a great *mezze* party without a lot of stress.

Up to two days ahead:

- Toast the pita chips and store in an air-tight container.
- Grill the eggplant, cover and refrigerate.

Up to one day ahead:

- Make the hummus and refrigerate.
- Make the eggplant dip and refrigerate.
- Make the tzatziki and refrigerate.
- Make the stuffed grape leaves and refrigerate.
- Make the meatball mixture and refrigerate.

Up to 4 hours ahead:

- Make and shape the zucchini fritters and refrigerate.
- Make and bake the spanakopita.
- Take the stuffed grape leaves out of the refrigerator and bring to a cool room temperature.

Up to 1 hour ahead:

- Re-crisp the pita chips in a low oven.
- Take the hummus, eggplant, and yogurt dip out of the refrigerator.
- Fry the zucchini fritters.
- Shape and fry the meatballs.

Can't grill the eggplant? Use the oven.

To broil the eggplants, position a rack 6 inches from the broiler and heat the broiler to high. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil. Prick the eggplants once with a paring knife to prevent them from exploding. Put them on the baking sheet and rub all over with 1 Tbs. olive oil. Broil, turning once, until the skin is charred in spots and the flesh is tender, 25 to 30 minutes.

If your oven doesn't have a broiler element, you can roast the eggplants instead. Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. Prick and oil the eggplants as directed above. Roast until the skins are wrinkled and the eggplant flesh is very soft, about 1 hour.

Pine Nut, Currant & Rice-Stuffed Grape Leaves (*Dolmades*)

Yields 30 to 36 pieces; serves eight to ten.

While soaking the currants in water is traditional, soaking them in wine gives them extra punch. You may find a wide variety of leaf sizes in a single jar of grape leaves. If you have any that are very large, use those to line the pan, or trim them to 5x5 inches before stuffing.

¼ cup dried currants
1 cup dry white wine
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup short-grain rice, such as arborio
½ cup small-diced yellow onion
⅓ cup pine nuts
5 medium scallions (white and light-green parts only), thinly sliced
Finely grated zest from 2 large lemons
2 medium cloves garlic, minced
Kosher or sea salt
2 Tbs. chopped fresh dill (stems reserved)
2 Tbs. chopped fresh mint (stems reserved)
30 to 36 bottled grape leaves, plus about 15 more for lining the pan (from one 15-oz. jar)
1½ Tbs. fresh lemon juice

In a small bowl, soak the currants in the wine for at least 4 hours but preferably overnight.

Heat the oil in a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the rice, onion, pine nuts, scallions, lemon zest, garlic, and ¾ tsp. salt. Reduce the heat to medium, and cook, stirring, until the onion is softened and fragrant, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the currants with their liquid and ½ cup of water. Cook over medium-high heat until most of the liquid has evaporated, about 6 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the chopped dill and mint.

Wipe the pan clean and line the bottom and sides with about 15 of the extra grape leaves—choose leaves that are large, torn, or have many holes. Top with half of the reserved dill and mint stems.

On a large cutting board or clean counter, lay out as many grape leaves as you have room for, veined side up. Remove any long stems. Drop a scant tablespoon of the rice mixture onto the bottom center of each leaf and with your fingers, shape the filling into a mound about 2 inches wide and 1 inch tall. Fold the bottom of the leaf up over the filling and then fold in the sides of the leaf to enclose the filling. Using the side of your finger, gently press the filling down toward the bottom fold of the grape leaf, and then tightly roll the filling up in the rest of the leaf, forming a stubby, compact cylinder.

As you fill and roll the leaves, tightly pack them in the pan, seam side down, forming concentric circles. Keep the layer of stuffed leaves as even and flat as you can.

Continue stuffing and packing the leaves until all the stuffing is used. Scatter the remaining dill and mint stems over the stuffed leaves and then cover with the remaining extra grape leaves. Fold over the grape leaves from the sides to completely cover the stuffed grape leaves.

Fill the pan with enough water to barely cover the leaves. Sprinkle the lemon juice on top. Weight down the stuffed leaves with a heavy heatproof plate or a pan partially filled with water. If you're using a plate that's not very heavy, put a 15-oz. can on the plate. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat and then reduce the heat to medium low and simmer for 50 minutes. Carefully remove and taste one stuffed leaf to see if the rice is soft. If not, continue cooking, checking every 10 minutes, until soft. Remove the pan from the heat and let cool at room temperature until warm, about 1 hour.

Remove the plate or pan from the top of the dolmades and carefully pour off the liquid, gently pressing down on the dolmades with a slotted spatula. Cover and chill for at least 1 hour. Serve cool or at room temperature.

Make ahead: You can make the stuffed grape leaves a day ahead.

Wine pairings

The vibrant flavors of this *meze* spread call for wines with abundant fruit and crisp acidity that will match the intensity of the dishes without overwhelming them. For whites, look for the 2006 Assyrtiko from Domaine Sigalas ($18) or a 2006 Gini Soave Classico from the Veneto ($16). A dry rosé is a versatile wine, and the 2007 Mas Grand Plagniol Rosé ($12) is among the best I've tasted recently. Finally, for reds, a youthful fruity Tempranillo blend would be perfect for this spread, especially for the lamb meatballs. Try the 2006 Red Guitar Old Vine Tempranillo-Garnacha from Spain ($10).

—Tim Gaiser, master sommelier

Zucchini Fritters
(*Kolokithakia keftedes*)

Yields 14 to 18 fritters; serves eight.

If you're making both the fritters and the meatballs, you can strain and reuse the fritter oil to fry the meatballs. Use a metal sieve, as the oil will be hot.

1 lb. zucchini (about 3 medium)
1 cup finely chopped yellow onion
2¼ oz. (½ cup) all-purpose flour
¼ cup finely chopped fennel stalks and leaves (save the bulb for another recipe)
1 Tbs. chopped fresh dill
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. chopped fresh oregano
⅛ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 to 1½ cups olive oil for frying
¼ cup grated kefalotyri cheese (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74) or Parmigiano-Reggiano
¼ cup crumbled feta cheese

Trim the zucchini and coarsely grate them on a box grater. Put the grated zucchini in a colander and squeeze out as much liquid as possible with your hands.

In a medium bowl, combine the zucchini, onion, flour, fennel, dill, baking powder, oregano, nutmeg, ½ tsp. salt, and ⅛ tsp. pepper and mix well. The mixture should be just moist enough to form into patties. For each fritter, press 2 generous Tbs. of the mixture into a patty about 3 inches in diameter and ¼ inch thick. Arrange them in a single layer on a cookie sheet.

Pour the oil into a 12-inch skillet to a depth of ¼ inch. Heat the oil over medium-high heat until it begins to ripple and bubbles immediately when the edge of one patty is dipped into it. Using 2 slotted metal spatulas (one to lift a patty and the other to push it off the spatula), add as many patties as will fit in the pan without crowding and fry, flipping once, until golden brown and crisp on both sides, 1 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer the fritters to a paper-towel-lined plate and repeat with another batch, adding more oil as needed.

Arrange the fritters on a platter and sprinkle with both cheeses. Serve warm.

Make ahead: The fritters can be made and shaped several hours ahead; fry them close to serving. Keep warm in a 200°F oven until ready to serve.

Crisp Lamb Meatballs
(*Keftedakia Arni*)

Yields 30 to 35 meatballs; serves eight to ten.

1½ oz. (about 1½ slices) good artisan-style bread or dense white sandwich bread (like Pepperidge Farm's Hearty White)
½ lb. ground lamb
¼ cup finely chopped yellow onion
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1½ Tbs. finely chopped fresh mint; more for garnish
1 Tbs. finely grated Greek kefalotyri cheese (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74) or good-quality pecorino or Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. finely chopped fresh oregano
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
Kosher or fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup all-purpose flour
2 to 3 cups olive oil for frying

Remove the bread crusts and save for testing the frying oil temperature. Put the bread slices in a small bowl and add enough water to soak the bread through (about ¼ cup). With your hands, squeeze the water out of the bread and tear it into small pieces into a medium bowl. Add the lamb, onion, egg, mint, cheese, garlic, oregano, cinnamon, 1 tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper to the bread and mix thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

With the palms of your hands, roll the meat mixture into 1-inch balls (about 1½ tsp. per ball). Spread the flour on a baking sheet and gently roll the balls in the flour until well covered. Transfer to a plate, shaking off excess flour.

Pour the oil into a 12-inch skillet to a depth of ½ inch. Heat the oil over medium-high heat until it begins to ripple and bubbles immediately when a piece of bread crust is dipped into it. Add the meatballs in a single layer and cook, turning occasionally, until crisp and brown on all sides, 4 to 6 minutes total. Transfer the meatballs to a plate lined with paper towels and let cool slightly.

Arrange the meatballs on a platter, sprinkle with the remaining mint, and serve warm.

Make ahead: You can make the meatball mixture up to a day ahead. You can shape the meatballs up to an hour ahead; fry them close to serving. Keep warm in a 200°F oven until ready to serve.

Susanna Hoffman is an anthropologist and food writer. Her most recent book is The Olive and The Caper: Adventures in Greek Cooking. ◆

Blueberries Star in Summer Desserts

To bring out the best in this summer fruit, choose simple flavor pairings that let the berries shine through

BY NICOLE REES

Fresh blueberries bring greed out into the open at my house. We taste the first berries of the season tentatively, since some will be surprisingly tart, but once the sun brings them to plump, sweet perfection, it's every man, woman, and child for himself.

I start the season eating the berries out of hand—why alter what nature has perfected by cooking or adding other flavors? A week or two of sublime berries takes the edge off this Puritan ethic, so then I'll allow myself to use blueberries as an ingredient. Still, I'm careful to choose desserts that bring out the best in blueberries, not hide their flavor.

When I bake with blueberries, I use complementary flavors in ways that won't overwhelm the berries, and I use these flavors with a light touch. Take my Black & Blueberry Pie pictured at right: It has lemon in it—a classic flavor accompaniment—but I don't add any to the berries. Instead I use the tang of both lemon zest and lemon juice to perk up the pastry, which also has the light crunch of cornmeal. It's not that I don't love lemon with blueberries—I use it again in my creamy and tangy Blueberry Streusel Bars with Lemon Cream Filling—but lemon juice in an all-fruit pie filling can push blueberries that are naturally balanced between sweet and tart over the edge into sourness.

A few other ingredients are on my "blueberry-friendly" list. In small amounts, warm spices like cinnamon and allspice accentuate rather than compete, enhancing the berries' richness and fragrance. My Peach & Blueberry Crisp with Spiced-Pecan Topping includes a touch of freshly grated nutmeg, which plays especially nicely with peaches and pecans. Brown sugar tastes great with berries of all kinds; I use it for the streusel and crust of the blueberry bars. And finally, as in the pie, I use citrus zest—this time lime—to add another layer of flavor to Blueberry-Lime Pound Cake; the lime juice goes into a glaze that gives the cake a tangy hit.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Black & Blueberry Pie with Lemon-Cornmeal Crust

Black & Blueberry Pie with Lemon-Cornmeal Crust

Serves eight.

Blackberries paired with blueberries make a classic American pie, but I go easy on the blackberries; their more assertive flavor and seedy texture can easily overwhelm the blueberries.

FOR THE DOUGH:

9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more as needed
⅓ cup fine yellow cornmeal
1 Tbs. granulated sugar
2 tsp. finely grated lemon zest
1 tsp. table salt
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into 10 pieces
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) cold vegetable shortening
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice combined with ¼ cup ice-cold water

FOR THE FILLING:

⅔ cup plus 1 Tbs. granulated sugar
⅓ cup cornstarch
⅛ tsp. ground allspice
⅛ tsp. ground cinnamon
⅛ tsp. table salt
5 cups room-temperature blueberries (1 lb., 10 oz.), washed and drained on paper towels
2 cups room-temperature blackberries (10½ oz.), washed and drained on paper towels
½ oz. (1 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) melted unsalted butter

Make the dough: In a large bowl, stir the flour, cornmeal, sugar, lemon zest, and salt. Using a pastry blender or two knives, begin to cut the butter into the flour. While the butter is still in large pieces, add the shortening to the bowl and continue to cut the fat into the flour until most pieces are the size of large peas.

With a big fork, stir in the lemon water, 1 to 2 Tbs. at a time, until the mixture looks shaggy but is moist enough to hold together when pressed. With well-floured hands, gently gather and press the dough into two equal disks, handling it only enough to make the edges of the disks reasonably smooth. Wrap the dough in plastic and chill for at least 60 minutes, but preferably 2 to 4 hours, before rolling. (The dough can be made up to 2 days ahead and refrigerated, or up to 2 months ahead and frozen.)

Roll the bottom crust: Roll one disk of the dough out on a lightly floured surface into a 13-inch circle about ⅛ inch thick. Gently transfer the dough to a 9-inch metal, glass, or ceramic pie plate (I like to fold the dough in half and unfold it into the pan). Don't stretch the dough as you line the pan, or it will spring back when baked. If necessary, trim the overhanging dough to 1 inch from the edge of the pan. Refrigerate until needed.

Make the filling: In a large bowl, whisk ⅔ cup of the sugar with the cornstarch, allspice, cinnamon, and salt. Add the blueberries and blackberries and toss gently until thoroughly combined. Set aside.

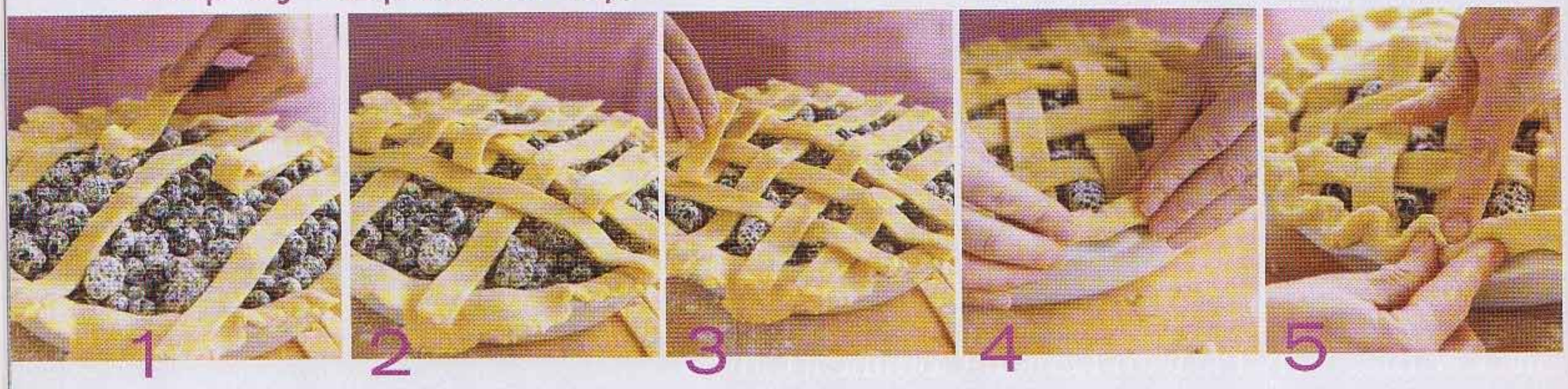
Fill and top the pie: Roll the second disk of dough out on a lightly floured surface into a 13-inch circle about ⅛ inch thick. Using a sharp knife or pizza cutter, cut the dough into ¾-inch-wide strips. Pour the fruit filling into the pastry-lined pie plate, being sure to include any dry ingredients remaining in the bowl. Lay five of the dough strips over the pie, parallel to each other and spaced evenly (use longer strips in the center of the pie and shorter strips near the edges). 1 Carefully fold back the second and fourth strips a little past the center of the pie and lay a long strip of dough across the center of the pie, perpendicular to the other strips. Unfold the second and fourth strips over the perpendicular strip. 2 Next, fold back the first, third, and fifth strips and lay a new strip across the pie, perpendicular to the folded strips. Unfold the three strips over the new strip. 3 Use this alternating technique to weave in three more strips (two go on the other side of the pie), completing the lattice top and evenly covering the pie. Trim the strips to overhang the pie by ¾ inch.

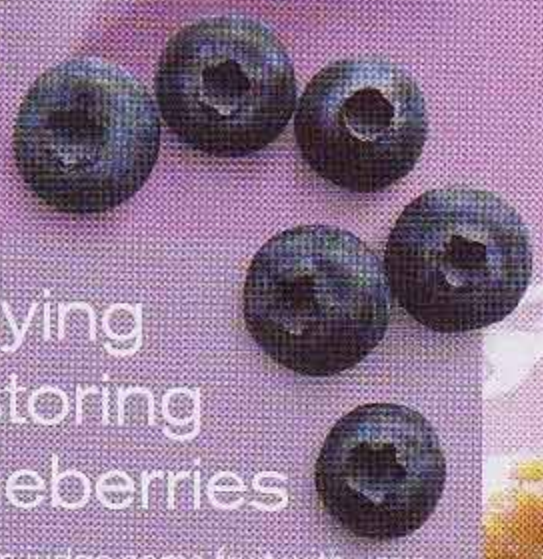
4 Roll the overhanging bottom dough and the strips together into a cylinder that rests on the edge of the pie pan. 5 Crimp the edge. Cut the cold 1 Tbs. butter into small pieces and dot over the open areas of the lattice. Freeze the assembled pie for about 15 minutes to relax the dough.

Meanwhile, position a rack in the center of the oven and set a foil-lined heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet on the rack. Heat the oven to 425°F. Just before baking, brush the lattice top with the melted butter and sprinkle with the remaining 1 Tbs. sugar. Put the pie on the heated baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F and bake until the fruit is bubbling consistently at the center of the pie, 60 to 80 minutes more. This is important—if it isn't bubbling near the center, it hasn't thickened yet. If the crust starts to get too brown, cover it loosely with foil during the last few minutes of the baking time.

Let the pie cool to just warm before serving. It can be stored at room temperature for up to 2 days.

Step-by-step lattice top





Buying & storing blueberries

You can judge some fruit with your nose, but not blueberries. Use your eyes first: Blueberries should have a lovely silvery-white bloom over the dark blue. Look for pints free of small, purplish or greenish immature berries, a sign that they were picked before their peak. Then use the "heft" test: Berries should be plump and heavy. The sure-fire way of judging blueberries is to taste a few, because sweetness is variable even within the same pint.

At home, pick through them, discarding any squishy berries that may turn moldy and infect their healthy neighbors. Store the berries in the coldest part of the refrigerator, but not in a drawer, where it's too humid. To keep them dry, don't wash them until you're ready to use them. I've kept fresh-picked blueberries for up to two weeks in an airtight container, although they can lose moisture during the second week and shrink slightly. For baking, this can work in your favor, because the flavor becomes concentrated. After that, it's time to freeze them. Rinse them in a colander, dry thoroughly on paper towels, and then spread them on rimmed baking sheets in a single layer until frozen solid. Once frozen, they go into plastic storage bags. Voilà...the flavor of summer.

Blueberry Streusel Bars with Lemon-Cream Filling

Yields 24 bars.

Always a hit at summer picnics, these addictive squares strike the perfect balance between tart and sweet and chewy and crunchy.

8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened; more for the pan
13½ oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour
1½ cups old-fashioned rolled oats (not quick oats)
1⅓ cups packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. table salt
1 tsp. baking powder
1 large egg, separated
14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk
½ cup fresh lemon juice
2 tsp. grated lemon zest
2½ cups room-temperature blueberries (about 13 oz.), washed and drained on paper towels

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line a 9x13-inch metal baking pan with foil, leaving a 1-inch overhang on the ends. Lightly butter the bottom and sides of the foil.

In a large bowl, combine the flour, oats, sugar, salt, and baking powder. Using your fingers, blend the butter completely into the flour mixture. Transfer 2 cups of crumb mixture to another bowl and reserve for the topping. Blend the egg white into the remaining crumbs and then press the mixture into the bottom of the pan to form a level crust. You can tamp it with the bottom of a measuring cup to even it out. Bake the crust until it starts to form a dry top, 10 to 12 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk the condensed milk, lemon juice, lemon zest, and egg yolk. Let this mixture stand for 5 minutes; it will begin to thicken.

Sprinkle the blueberries evenly over the hot crust and then drop spoonfuls of the lemon mixture over the blueberries. Spread gently with a spatula to distribute a little more evenly, but take care not to crush the berries; it's fine if the lemon mixture isn't perfectly even. Bake until the lemon mixture just begins to form a shiny skin, 7 to 8 minutes.

Sprinkle the reserved topping over the lemon-blueberry layer, pressing the streusel between your fingers into small lumps as you sprinkle. Bake until the filling is bubbling at the edges and the topping is brown, 25 to 30 minutes.

Let the bars cool in the pan on a rack until just warm, about an hour. Carefully lift them out of the pan using the foil overhang and transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Remove the foil and cut into 24 bars when cool. The bars may be stored at room temperature for a few hours but otherwise should be kept in the refrigerator.

Peach & Blueberry Crisp with Spiced-Pecan Topping

Serves six.

Unlike most recipes for fruit crisp, which feed a large crowd, this one, baked in a 9-inch pan, is perfect for smaller households or gatherings. I love this crisp served with vanilla-bean ice cream.

2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened; more for the pan
3 oz. (⅔ cup) all-purpose flour
½ cup packed light brown sugar
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. table salt
⅔ cup coarsely chopped pecans
3 cups (about 1 lb.) room-temperature blueberries, washed and drained on paper towels
3 medium peaches (about 1 lb.), halved, pitted, and sliced ½ inch thick
¼ cup granulated sugar
3 Tbs. cornstarch
¼ tsp. freshly ground nutmeg

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Lightly butter a 9-inch square metal or ceramic baking pan.

In a small bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, and ⅛ tsp. of the salt. With your fingers, work the butter into the flour mixture until the mixture readily clumps together when pressed. Mix in the pecans.

In a large bowl, toss the blueberries and peaches. In a small bowl, combine the granulated sugar with the cornstarch, nutmeg, and the remaining ⅛ tsp. salt and toss this mixture with the fruit.

Spread the fruit into the prepared baking pan. Pressing the streusel into small lumps, sprinkle it over the fruit. Bake until the fruit is bubbling in the center and the topping is crisp and well browned, 45 to 50 minutes. Cool slightly and serve warm.

Blueberry-Lime Pound Cake

Serves twelve to sixteen.

Lime zest and a tangy lime-juice glaze add zip to the sweet summer flavor of fresh blueberries in this moist, tender pound cake. The cream cheese is an unusual ingredient for pound cake, but it lends the typically springy crumb an exceptional richness and tenderness and helps the cake stay moist and fresh for several days.

FOR THE CAKE:

8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened; more for the pan
10½ oz. (2⅓ cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan
1½ tsp. baking power
¼ tsp. plus ⅛ tsp. table salt
1¾ cups granulated sugar
2 tsp. finely grated lime zest
6 oz. cream cheese, softened
4 large eggs plus 1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
2½ cups room-temperature blueberries (about 13 oz.), washed and drained on paper towels

FOR THE GLAZE:

4 oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice; more as needed

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 12-cup Bundt pan.

Make the cake: Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt into a medium bowl. Put the sugar and lime zest in a food processor and pulse 20 times, or until the zest is in small pieces. (If you don't have a food processor, omit this step and blend the zest into the flour.)

With a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or a hand mixer, beat the butter and cream cheese in a large bowl on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add the sugar mixture and beat on medium until light and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. With the mixer still running, add the whole eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition and stopping the mixer to scrape the bowl twice. Beat in the egg yolk. Reduce the mixer speed to low and slowly add the flour mixture. Stop the mixer one last time to scrape the bowl and then beat at medium speed until the batter is smooth and light, about 20 seconds. With a rubber spatula, gently fold the blueberries into the batter.

Transfer the batter to the prepared pan, spreading it evenly with the spatula. Run a knife through the batter or tap the pan lightly against the counter to eliminate any air pockets. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, 50 to 55 minutes. Set the pan on a wire rack to cool for 10 minutes and then invert onto the rack, remove the pan, and let cool completely.

Glaze the cake: In a spouted measuring cup or bowl, whisk the confectioners' sugar and lime juice together until smooth. The glaze should be thin enough to pour. If not, add more lime juice, 1 tsp. at a time. Put a baking sheet under the rack to catch drips and drizzle the glaze over the top and sides of the cake. Let the glaze set fully before transferring to a cake plate and serving.

Nicole Rees is a food scientist and professional baker.

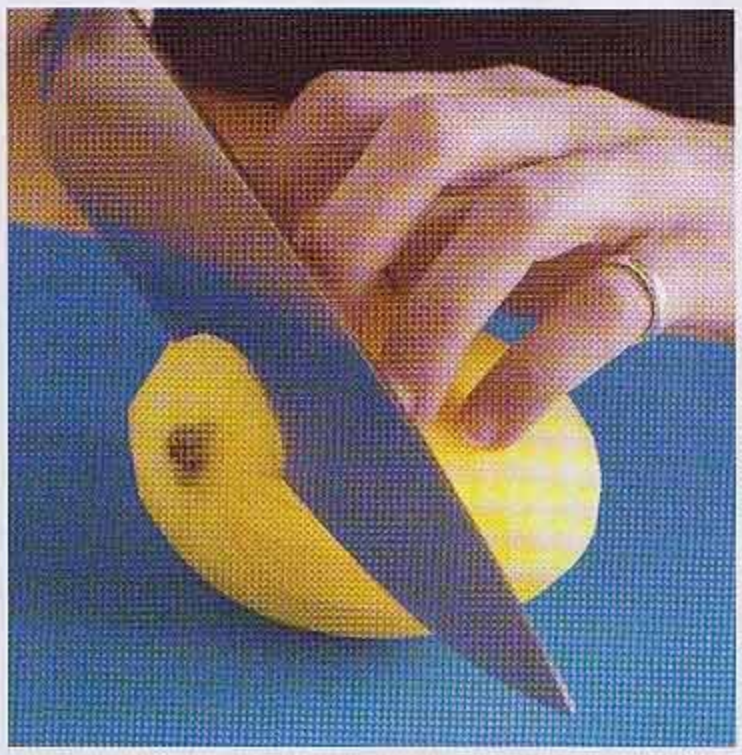
tip: Be sure to use room-temperature berries. Cold fruit straight from the refrigerator will prevent your dessert from baking evenly.

from our test kitchen

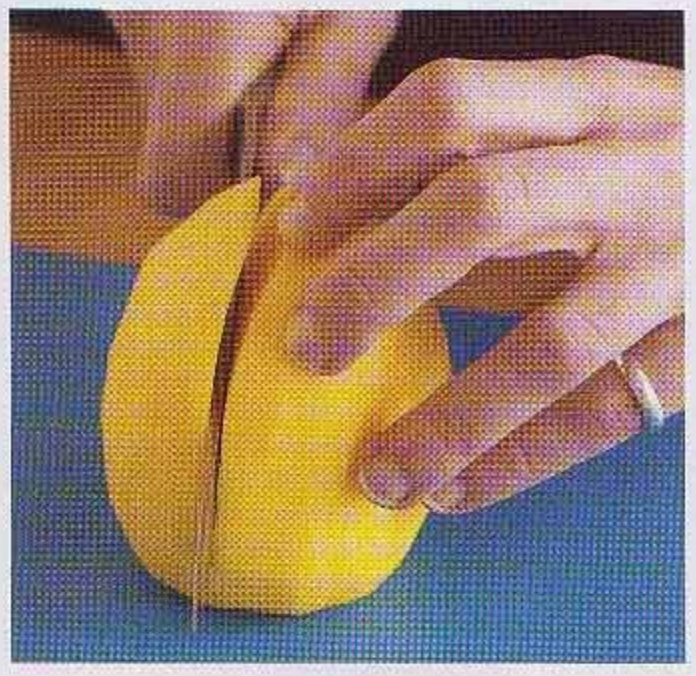
knife skills

Cutting mango matchsticks

The recipe for Spicy Slaw with Radicchio & Green Mango on p. 52 calls for a cup of matchstick-cut mango. Cutting foods like carrots and potatoes into matchsticks is pretty straightforward, but a mango, with its leathery skin and broad, cumbersome pit, is a bit trickier. Here's how we do it:



1. *Use a very sharp vegetable peeler or a paring knife to remove the skin; try not to take a lot of the fruit along with it. Cut a slice off the stem end to make a stable base and then stand the mango upright on the base.*



2. *Cut the flesh away from each broad side of the fruit. The pit tapers at the top and bottom, so start a little closer to the center and cut down in a slight arc to follow the contour of the pit. Repeat along the two remaining narrow sides, trying to avoid the fibrous edge of the pit.*

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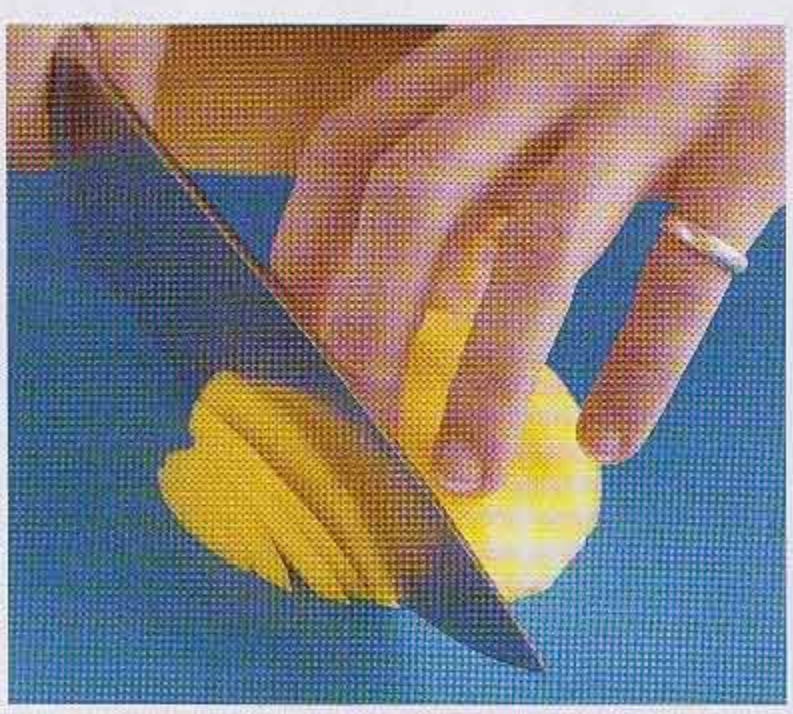
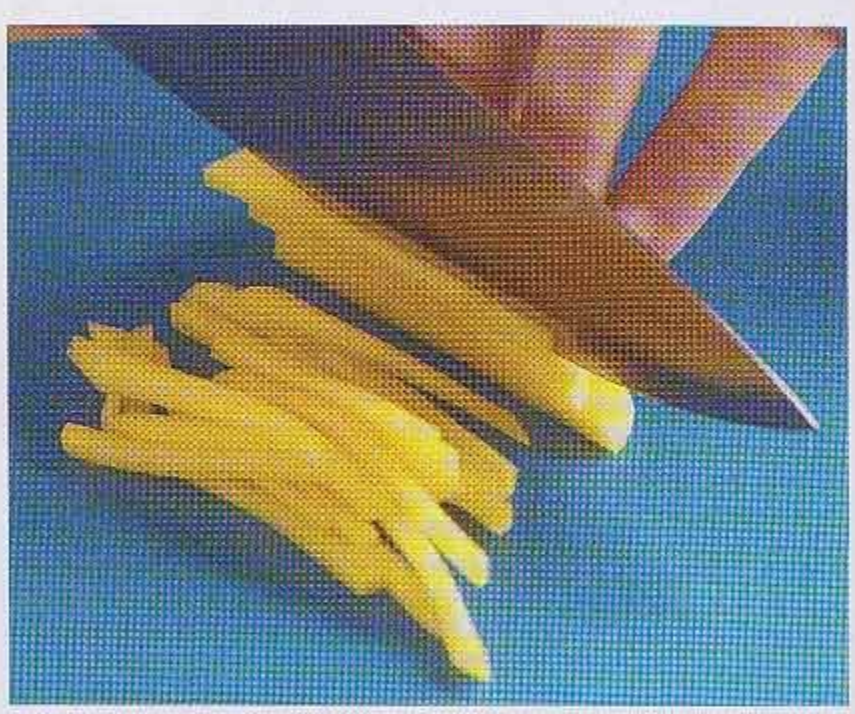
BY DABNEY GOUGH

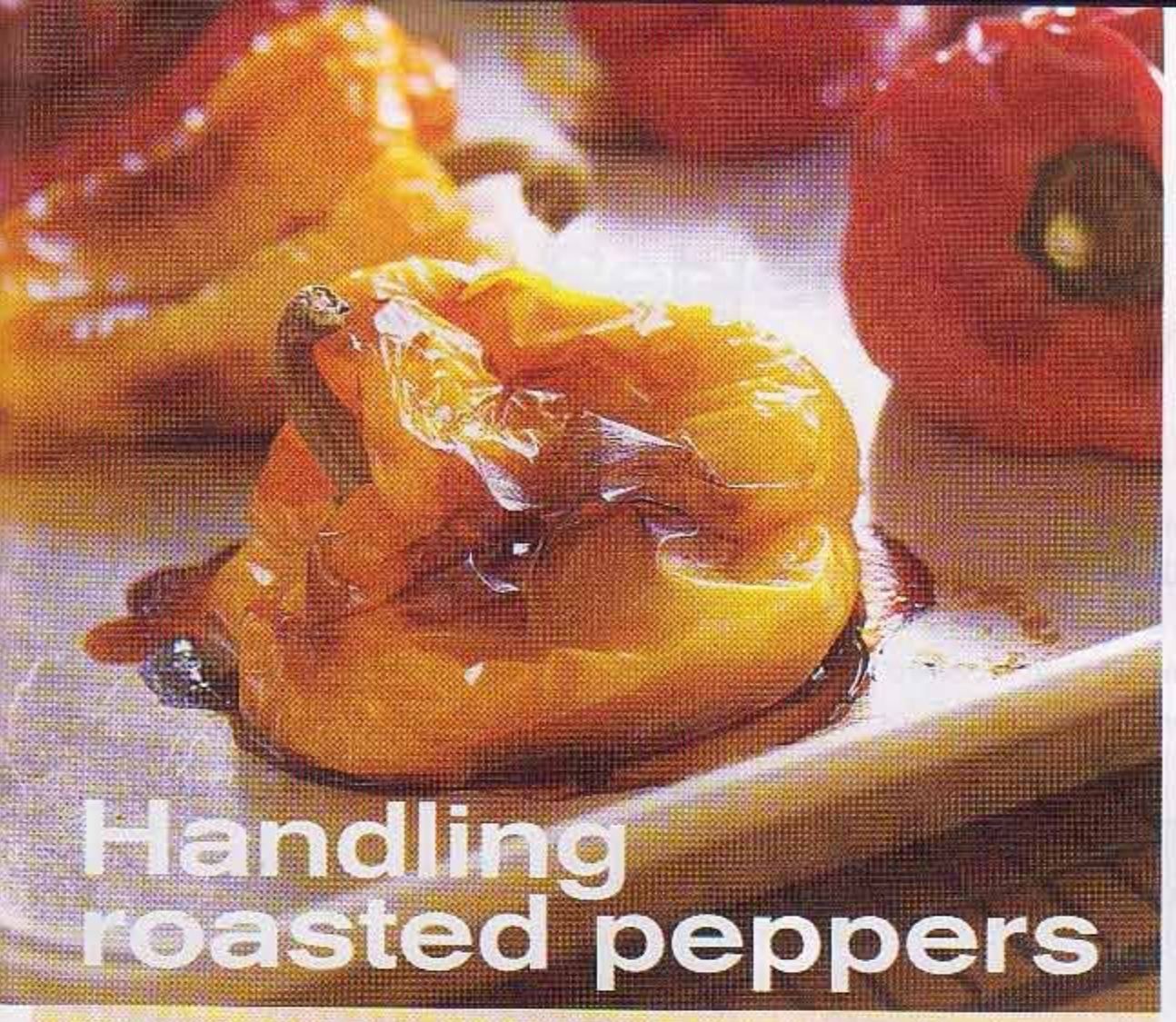


3. *Slice the fruit lengthwise about ⅛ inch thick. Or for larger matchsticks, slice the fruit thicker.*



4. *Stack three or four slices flat on the board and cut lengthwise again about ⅛ inch thick, or thicker if you're making larger matchsticks.*

Photos: Scott Phillips



Handling roasted peppers

We peeled a lot of roasted peppers to test the recipes for "Two Ways to Roast a Pepper" on pp. 58–61, and along the way we collected several tips for working with them.

Steaming is important, so don't skip this step. Putting the just-roasted peppers in some sort of closed environment—usually a paper bag, a plastic-covered bowl, or under a towel—creates a steam bath and helps loosen any nooks and crannies that didn't get the full blast during roasting.

Keep a bowl of water handy. Roasted peppers produce a slippery juice, and once it's on your hands it acts like a magnet for charred bits of pepper skin. Dunking your fingers in water gets rid of those pesky flecks.

Get most of the seeds out at once by pulling the stem and core out together. Then you'll have just a few loose seeds to brush off.

Use a table knife to scrape off stubborn skin. This is particularly helpful if you roast the peppers directly over a flame, which sometimes leaves you with a few uncharred spots that don't come off on their own.

A few seeds and flecks of skin aren't a big deal, so don't spend too long trying to get every little bit off. And don't rinse the peppers or you'll wash away some of their flavor, too.

Knives:
You've got to know when to hone 'em

I can always spot professional cooks, even without the checkered pants: They're the ones who bring their own knives to cook at someone else's house. Why? Most people have dull knives, which are frustrating to use if you're accustomed to a sharp blade. Knife work is faster and easier with a sharp knife, and that means less strain on your wrist.

Try the tomato test. Even the best knives will dull eventually, some faster than others, depending on what they're made of and how much you use them. To see if your knives need some attention, very gently draw a knife blade across a ripe tomato. Avoid exerting force—the weight of the knife itself should be the only pressure on the tomato. Try testing different points along the length of the blade, too. Depending on your cutting style, you may find that certain parts of the blade dull faster than others. If the knife doesn't cut through the tomato skin, it needs to be honed on a steel.

Repeat the tomato test after honing the knife, and if it still fails, it likely needs to be sharpened. There are lots of tools available for home sharpening, or you can send your knives to a professional sharpening service. To learn more about all the sharpening options, see the article "Knife Sharpeners: Find the One That's Right for You" on our Web site (Finecooking.com). If you need to brush up on your technique with a steel, you'll also find a video demonstration called "How to Hone Your Knife" on the Web site.

Beyond feta: Getting to know Greek cheeses

When you think of Greek cheeses, feta might be the only one that comes to mind, but it's just one of many cheeses made in Greece. Unfortunately, only a few of them make their way to the United States. Here are some of the lesser-known Greek cheeses that are available in the U.S., including kefalotyri, a cheese that's called for in several of the *meze* recipes on pp. 62–67.

Manouri

has a shape-shifting texture that took our tasters by surprise: It crumbles like feta, but then it melts in your mouth like Brie. Manouri boasts a unique combination of ingredients: Whey from feta production is fortified with cream, which is what gives manouri its undeniable richness and gentle tang. Its flavor depends on whether it's made with sheep's milk, goat's milk, or a blend of the two. Eat it straight or add it to salads.

Myzithra

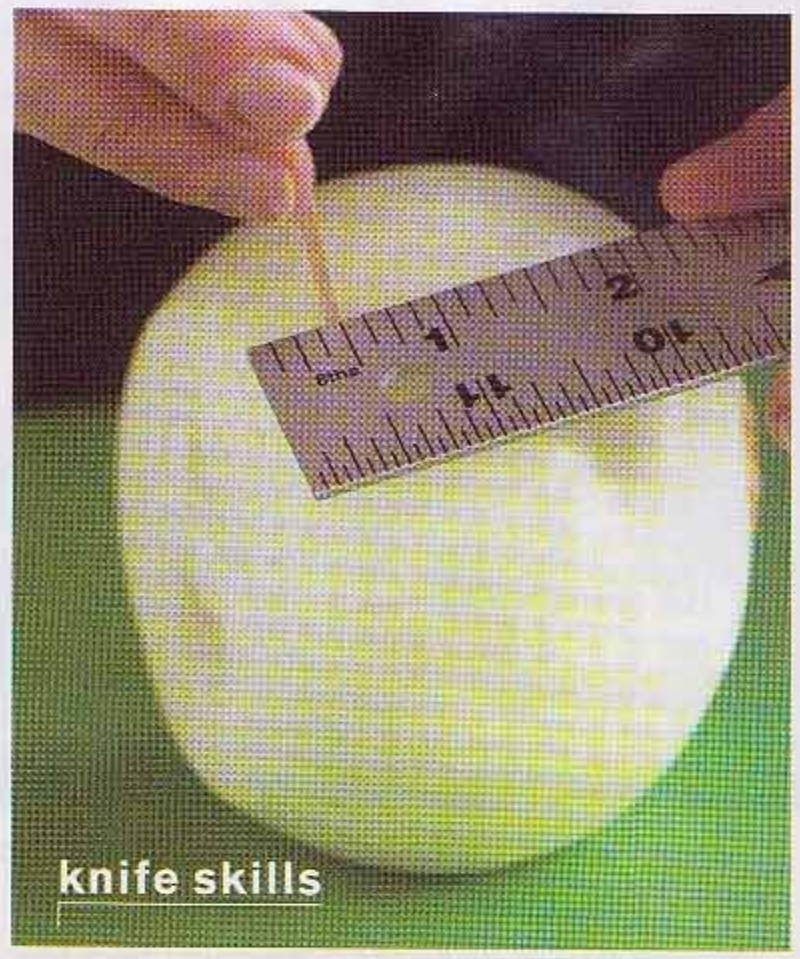
is made from sheep's milk or goat's milk, and it's sold either fresh or aged, but you're most likely to find the aged kind in the U.S. It has a crumbly, cottony texture, a hefty amount of salt, and an intense flavor. A little goes a long way, so it's best used as a grating cheese in a dish with other strong flavors.

Kefalotyri

is a mild aged cheese made from sheep's milk. It has a firm texture, a nutty quality (a bit like Spanish manchego), and a subtle flavor reminiscent of preserved lemons. If you're making the *mezze* but can't find any kefalotyri, use Parmigiano-Reggiano instead.

Thinly sliced, kefalotyri is great for snacking. For a more indulgent nibble you can also dredge the slices in egg and flour and then pan-fry them.

These cheeses can be difficult to track down, even in well-stocked cheese shops. Unless you live near a Greek grocery, your best bet is to shop online; see p. 82 for sources.



knife skills

Effortless onion rings

Slicing an onion into rings—how hard can it be? Well, if you're going for rings of even thickness, it can be a little challenging. A whole, round onion doesn't have a stable base, so it shifts under the force of your knife, making it hard to cut straight. The bigger the onion, the more unwieldy it is. These tricks make it easier to cut nice, uniform slices:

Minimize wobbling by slicing a bit off the onion's side. This isn't ideal if you need all of the rings to stay whole, but if it doesn't matter (or if you're going to skewer them anyway), it helps to stabilize the onion as you slice.

Try a toothpick to mark guide points. Use a ruler to measure your desired thickness and prick the onion with a toothpick at that point several times all the way around the onion. When you slice through, "connect the dots" with your knife.

Use a mandoline if you have one. It's the easiest way to make rings that are exactly the same thickness.

Reblending tahini

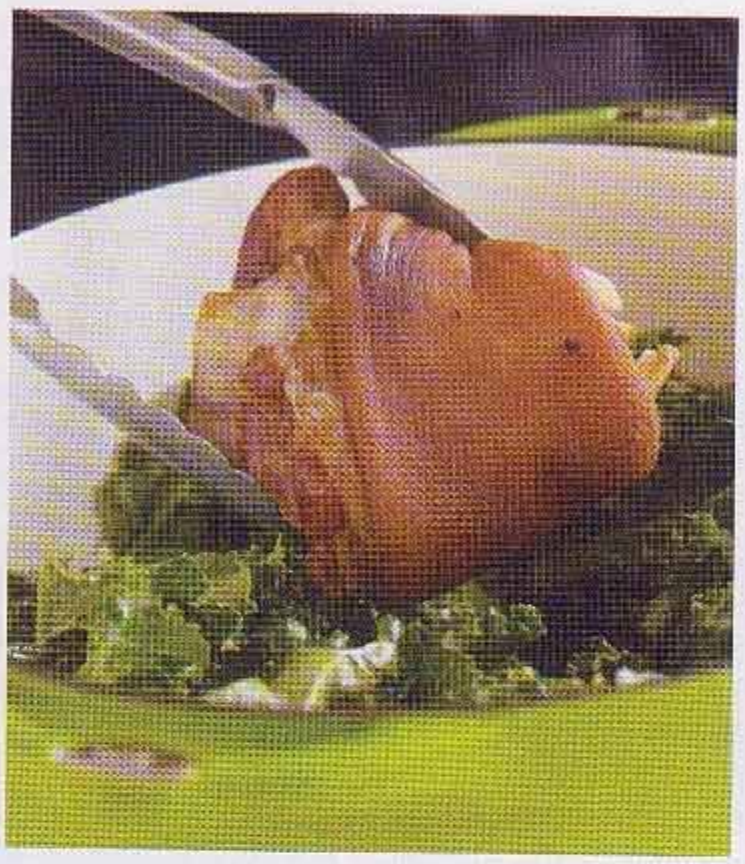
The hummus on p. 64 gets its nutty edge from tahini, a paste made from ground sesame seeds.

Most commercial tahini is made without added emulsifiers, which means that the oil usually separates from the solids, as natural peanut butter tends to do.

If you have time, let the container sit upside down on the counter overnight and gravity will remix the tahini for you. Otherwise, put the separated tahini in a food processor and blitz it until smooth.

Ham hocks: nature's bouillon cubes

As a vegetarian growing up in Virginia, I always thought of ham hocks as my nemesis. Green beans, collards, black-eyed peas, you name it—they all were cooked with ham hocks. Many years later, I'm omnivorous again and have a new appreciation for this flavorful cut. Though they contain too little meat to be worth eating on their own, ham hocks are great for boosting the flavor of other dishes, much as a bouillon cube does.



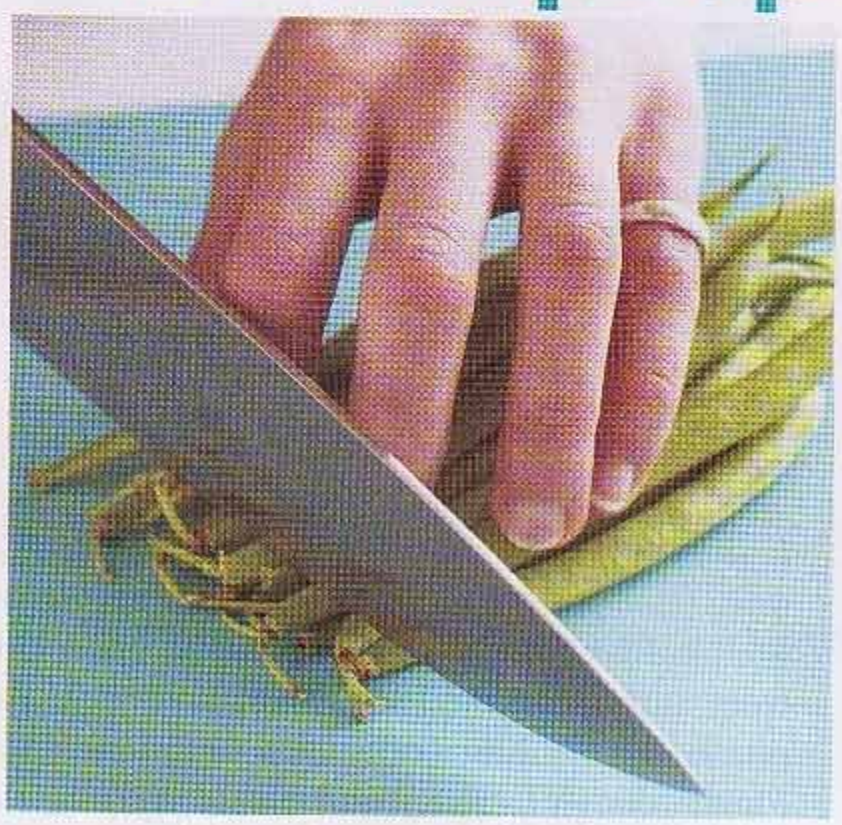
Ham hocks come from the bottom part of the pig's leg, between the meaty ham and the foot. They're typically cured and smoked, which gives them a longer shelf life and a more complex flavor.

Look for ham hocks in the supermarket meat case, where they're sometimes sold in two-packs.

The Spicy Red-Eye Baked Beans recipe on p. 56 calls for only one ham hock, but you can store the extra one, tightly wrapped, in the freezer for up to six months.

If you can't find smoked ham hocks at the supermarket, a smoked turkey leg is a good substitute.

Faster green bean prep



Trimming a couple of pounds of beans for the Green Bean Salad on p. 44 might take you a while—if you trim them one at a time, that is. Here's our strategy for quickly tackling a mound of beans:

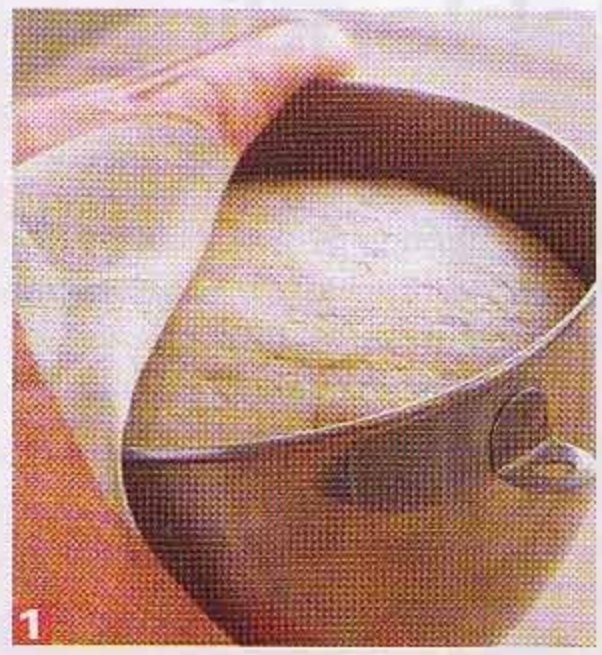
Start at the store. When you pick out your green beans, don't toss them into the bag in a jumble. Instead, pick them out one at a time and line them up in the bag with all the stems together. This takes a few extra minutes (and, yes, it does make you look a bit obsessive), but it'll pay off at home. Plus, you won't end up with any rejects, as you might if you pick your beans by the handful.

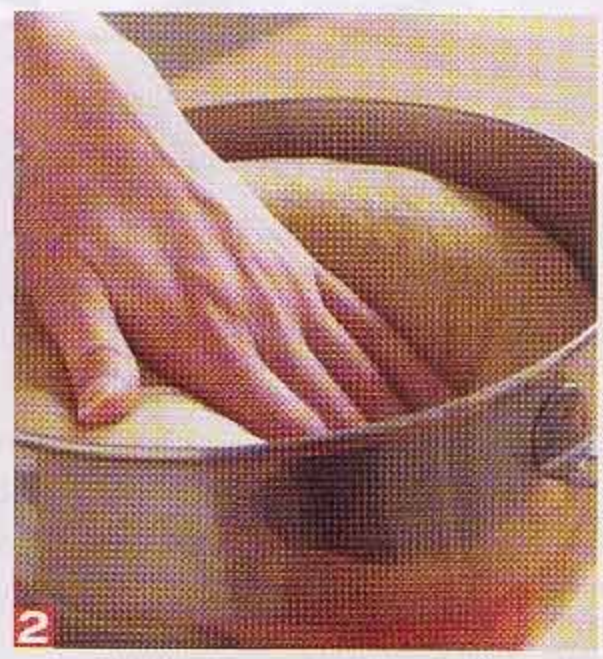
Trim a handful at a time. Grab a small handful and lightly tap the stems on a cutting board until they're all lined up. Cut all the stems off with a single chop of a chef's knife. In the test kitchen, we like how the pretty tail ends look, so we trim only the stems. But if you'd rather or if the tails look less than perfect, feel free to trim them off, too.

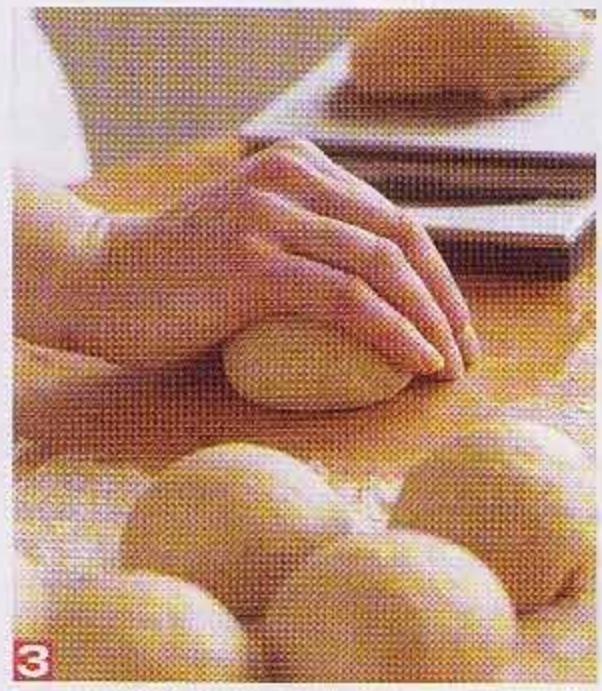
Wash the beans after you trim. Now that they're trimmed, you can toss them into the colander for rinsing without keeping them lined up.

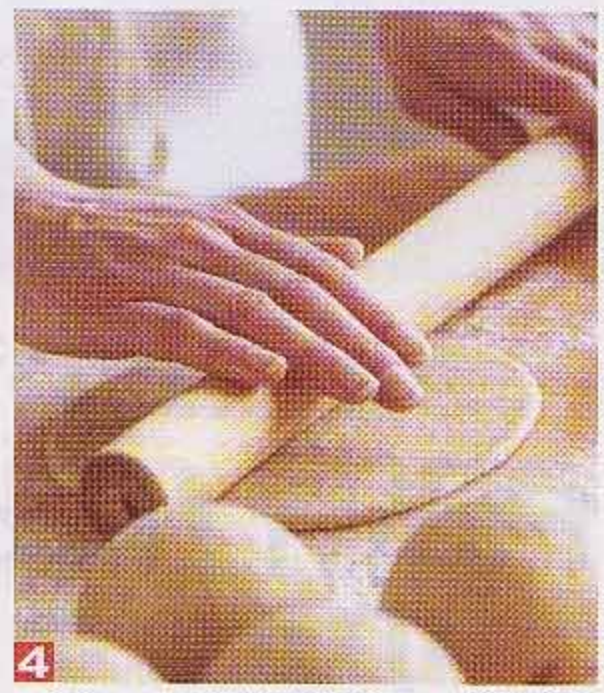
How to make pita bread

If you're making our Greek *meze* menu and you plan to serve fresh pita with it, you'll score extra points with your guests if you make the pita yourself using this recipe from author Susanna Hoffman. Like most flatbreads, pita really isn't difficult to make—it just takes some time for the dough to rise. Your reward is fresh, warm pita bread that beats anything you can buy at the store and a great "look-what-I-made!" feeling as you pull the hot pitas from the oven.









Homemade Greek Pita

Yields twelve 7-inch pitas.

It helps to have a scale to divide the dough evenly, and you'll need at least 6 square feet of counter space to lay out the rolled pitas.

1 tsp. granulated sugar
Two ¼-oz. packages active dry yeast
13½ oz. (3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for dusting
13½ oz. (3 cups) whole-wheat flour
2 tsp. kosher or sea salt; more for sprinkling
⅓ cup plus 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Make the dough: In a liquid measure, stir the sugar into 1 cup of lukewarm water. Stir in the yeast and set aside until the yeast is foamy, 5 to 10 minutes.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, stir together both flours and the salt. Make a well in the center and pour the yeast mixture, ⅓ cup of the oil, and 1 cup lukewarm water into the well. Mix with the dough hook on low speed until the dough becomes smooth and elastic and gathers around the hook, 4 to 5 minutes.

By hand, shape the dough into a ball. Wipe out the mixing bowl and put the dough back in the bowl. Drizzle the dough with the remaining 2 Tbs. oil and turn the dough to coat lightly all over. 1 Cover with a cloth and set aside in a warm place to rise until doubled in size, about 1 hour. 2 Gently deflate the dough with your hands, cover, and let it rest for 20 minutes.

Shape the pitas: Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter. Divide the dough into 12 even pieces, about 3¾ oz. each. 3 Shape each piece into a rough ball and then put each ball on an unfloured section of counter, cup your hand over it, and quickly rotate your hand over the dough. As long as the dough is a little stuck to the counter, this motion shapes the dough into a tight, evenly round ball.

4 On the floured part of the counter, roll each piece into a ⅛-inch-thick round that's about 7 inches across. As you finish each round, set it aside on a lightly floured surface. When all the dough is rolled, cover the rounds with a damp cloth (or two) and let them rest again for about 1 hour—they'll get a little puffy but won't double in size. Meanwhile, position a rack in the bottom of the oven and heat the oven to 500°F.

Bake the pitas: Lightly sprinkle the dough rounds with salt. Arrange as many of the rounds as will fit without overlapping on an unrimmed, ungreased baking sheet and bake until the pitas begin to turn golden on top, 5 to 6 minutes. As each batch comes out of the oven, stack the pitas 3 or 4 high and wrap in clean kitchen towels.

Serve immediately or let cool to room temperature. Well wrapped, they'll keep for 3 days in the refrigerator or 6 months in the freezer. Reheat in a warm oven to soften before serving.

Note: Greek pitas normally don't have pockets—they're meant to be wrapped around foods, not stuffed. That said, we found that this recipe has the potential to make some very puffy pocketed pitas, which we liked. Pitas puff and form pockets when the gas produced by the yeast in the dough expands in a hot oven. Sometimes our pitas puffed like balloons, and sometimes they didn't. We found that the pitas were more likely to puff when we rolled the dough quickly but gently so as to express as little gas as possible, and when we were extra careful transferring the rounds to the baking sheet. It also helped to put each sheet of pitas into the oven when it was in a heating cycle. ◆

Hoisin Sauce
from the supermarket

BY DENISE MICKELSEN

Hoisin sauce, the intensely flavored, dark-brown Chinese dipping sauce that perks up classics like Peking duck and mu-shu pork also brings tangy, robust flavor to a great new recipe in this issue, Hoisin Barbecue Ribs (see p. 48). Hoisin is made from fermented soybeans, sugar, garlic, chiles, and vinegar, and its high sugar content makes it a wonderful addition to barbecue sauces and marinades for roasted or grilled meats. We also love adding it to stir-fried greens such as bok choy, broccoli, or spinach.

Supermarket hoisin sauces vary widely in flavor, color, and consistency, the best being dark brown, thick, and richly flavored with soy, garlic, and chiles. To find out which brand we wanted to use in our test kitchen—and our homes—we held a blind tasting of several widely available brands. We were looking for a hoisin sauce with a good balance of sweet and salty notes and lots of soy flavor.

Kikkoman hoisin sauce ($3.29 for a 9.3-ounce jar) took the prize for its glossy appearance and "deep and dark aroma of fermented soybeans," according to one impressed taster. There was a lovely balance of roasty soybean flavor, sweet caramel, spicy heat, and a moderate saltiness. This hoisin is our top choice for spreading onto mu-shu pancakes or serving on its own as a dipping sauce.

Lee Kum Kee hoisin sauce ($2.19 for an 8.5-ounce jar) was a close second. Our tasters liked its pleasant aroma and commented that the flavors of chiles and soybeans shone through the sauce's sweetness with a nice spicy kick, although some wished it had a bit more tang. This hoisin would be a great addition to a barbecue sauce or marinade in which you could amp up the flavors according to your taste.

One worth looking for

After scouring the supermarket shelves and polling our reader scouts for the brands of hoisin they have on hand, I decided to check out my local Asian market to see if there was anything I was missing. There I found **Koon Chun** hoisin, which our tasters loved. Almost too thick to be called a sauce—it was jammy and not nearly as smooth as the supermarket brands—this hoisin had the most complex flavor profile by far, with an almost smoky fermented soybean and molasses taste that unfolded across the palate into perfectly proportioned sweet and sour notes. The only down side to this hoisin was its saltiness, which was troublesome for a few tasters. Use this brand sparingly, as a condiment or in sauces and marinades, for a marvelous depth of flavor that the supermarket brands lack. Look for Koon Chun hoisin at an Asian market or online at Adrianascaravan.com, where a 15-ounce jar costs $3.95. ◆

Photos: Scott Phillips

nutrition

Recipe	Page	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol.	Sodium	Fiber	Notes
		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	
In Season	24												
Balsamic-Glazed Grilled Sweet Onions		130	40	2	20	4.5	0.5	3.5	0.5	0	110	3	per ¼ cup
Fresh from the Farm	40												
Grilled Flatbreads		120	15	4	21	2	0	1	0	0	270	1	1/16 tsp. salt each
Lemon-Garlic Oil with Herbs		120	120	0	0	14	2	10	1.5	0	0	0	per 1 Tbs.
Potato Salad with Olives, Scallions & Garden Herbs		290	140	3	35	15	2	11	1.5	0	700	4	
Grilled Chicken with Apricot Balsamic Glaze		590	290	59	14	32	10	12	7	195	470	0	
Green Bean Salad with Tomatoes & Arugula		230	160	8	10	18	6	9	1.5	30	410	4	
Lemon-Buttermilk Pudding Cakes		210	80	5	27	9	5	3	0.5	100	140	1	
Grilling Tender Ribs	46												
Hoisin Barbecued Ribs		630	380	44	16	42	15	18	7	160	1250	1	
Apple-Bacon Barbecued Ribs		600	380	43	8	43	16	18	6	160	860	1	
No-Cook Side Dishes	50												
Squash Ribbons with Daikon, Oregano & Basil		120	100	2	4	11	1.5	7	1	0	150	1	
Marinated Tomatoes with Pickled Onions & Gorgonzola		100	60	3	6	7	2.5	3.5	0.5	10	250	2	
Spicy Slaw with Radicchio & Green Mango		80	50	1	8	5	1	2	0	0	340	2	
Cucumber & Feta Toss with Mint & Dill		110	80	4	5	9	3.5	4	0.5	15	350	1	
Shredded Carrots with Jalapeño, Lime & Cilantro		120	80	1	9	9	1.5	7	1	0	200	2	
Baked Beans	54												
Cider & Bacon Baked Beans		260	50	16	37	6	2	2.5	1	10	470	9	
Sherry Baked Beans with Chorizo		360	120	19	38	14	4.5	7	2	25	570	12	
Spicy Red-Eye Baked Beans		410	140	26	41	16	6	6	1.5	60	350	10	
Sweet Peppers	58												
Chilled Oven-Roasted Yellow Pepper Soup		170	110	4	14	13	2	9	1.5	0	310	2	
Fire-Roasted Pepper Relish		80	60	1	5	6	1	4.5	0.5	0	150	2	per 1/3 cup
Oven-Roasted Pepper Tart with Prosciutto & Goat Cheese		350	240	7	20	27	15	9	1.5	145	300	1	
Fire-Roasted Pepper & Shrimp Fettuccine		590	170	32	73	19	3	12	3	170	790	6	
Greek Small Plates	62												
Crisp Lamb Meatballs		120	70	7	5	8	2.5	4	0.5	45	170	1	
Greek Spinach & Feta Pie		400	240	13	28	27	9	14	2.5	90	790	3	
Rustic Eggplant Dip		10	5	0	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	35	1	per 1 Tbs.
Hummus with Tahini		40	20	1	4	2.5	0	1.5	0.5	0	45	1	per 1 Tbs.
Cucumber-Yogurt Dip		15	10	1	0	1.5	1	0	0	0	30	0	per 1 Tbs.
Zucchini Fritters		80	35	3	11	3.5	1	2	0	5	190	1	
Pine Nut, Currant & Rice-Stuffed Grape Leaves		170	90	2	13	11	1.5	6	2.5	0	430	1	
Toasted Pita Chips		220	70	5	33	7	1	5	1	0	460	1	per 16 chips
Blueberry Desserts	68												
Black & Blueberry Pie with Lemon-Cornmeal Crust		480	220	4	63	24	13	7	2.5	50	270	5	
Peach & Blueberry Crisp with Spiced-Pecan Topping		400	160	4	61	18	6	8	3.5	20	105	5	
Blueberry Streusel Bars with Lemon-Cream Filling		270	90	4	41	10	6	2.5	0.5	35	140	2	
Blueberry-Lime Pound Cake		360	150	5	48	17	10	4.5	1	110	140	1	
Test Kitchen	74												
Homemade Greek Pita		300	80	8	48	9	1.5	6	1	0	330	5	1/8 tsp. salt each
Quick & Delicious	86a												
Grilled Shrimp & Calamari Salad with Arugula		320	190	20	11	22	3	15	2.5	190	480	3	
Linguine with Zucchini, Pancetta & Parmigiano		580	120	24	90	13	4.5	4.5	2	25	1080	6	
Grilled Prosciutto, Fontina & Tomato Sandwiches		150	60	8	13	7	3.5	2.5	0.5	25	490	1	
Sear-Roasted Halibut with Tomato & Capers		280	100	37	8	11	1.5	6	2	55	570	1	
Grilled Prosciutto-Wrapped Chicken		290	130	37	1	14	6	5	1	105	760	0	
Chicken Piccata		380	140	55	2	16	4.5	8	2	155	620	0	
Orecchiette with Fennel, Sausage & Tomatoes		680	240	24	75	27	8	13	3	35	1430	7	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at Nutritional Solutions in Melville, New York. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used. Optional ingredients with measured amounts are included; ingredients without specific quantities are not. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the quantities of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ⅛ teaspoon salt and 1/16 teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.

quick & delicious

Inspired by Italy

BY TONY ROSENFELD

While living and cooking in Italy, I learned the best culinary lessons at the marketplace, where I discovered the beauty of each growing season and the importance of getting to know the spirited butchers, fishmongers, and bakers, all of whom humored my rough Italian. These days, I still go to the market before I decide what to cook; that way, I can choose ingredients that look especially fresh. At this time of year, I usually head right to the stars of the vegetable world—tomatoes, zucchini, and greens—which are in season and require little embellishment.

The recipes here are inspired by my Italian experience. Some are interpretations of Italian classics, some are my own Italian-style creations, and some, like the chicken piccata, are Italian-American favorites. Buon appetito!

Sear-Roasted Halibut with Tomato & Capers

Serves four.

1 pint cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
2 Tbs. capers, rinsed and chopped
1½ Tbs. chopped fresh oregano
1½ tsp. balsamic vinegar
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1½ lb. thick skinless halibut fillet (or other mild white fish, like cod), cut into 4 even pieces
⅓ cup all-purpose flour
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

In a medium bowl, mix the tomatoes, capers, oregano, vinegar, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper.

Season the fish with ¾ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper and dredge it in the flour, shaking off the excess. Heat the oil in a 12-inch (preferably nonstick) ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering hot. Add the fish, evenly spaced, and cook without touching until it browns and releases easily from the pan (check by gently lifting one of the corners), about 3 minutes. Flip the fish, sprinkle the garlic around it, and cook until the garlic just starts to brown on some edges, about 30 seconds. Pour the tomato mixture around the fish and transfer the skillet to the oven. Roast until the fish is just firm to the touch and opaque when you pry open a thicker piece with a paring knife, 3 to 6 minutes.

Let the fish rest for a couple of minutes and then serve with the tomato mixture spooned over it.

Tip: To dress up this dish and add color, try using several varieties of tiny tomatoes.

Grilled Prosciutto, Fontina & Sun-Dried Tomato Sandwiches

Serves ten as an appetizer or two to three as a main course.

1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium cloves garlic, smashed
5 oz. baby spinach (about 5 lightly packed cups)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1¼ cups grated fontina cheese
¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
6 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and chopped
Three 7- to 8-inch pitas, each split into two rounds
6 very thin slices prosciutto, preferably imported (about 3½ oz.)

Heat the oven to 250°F. Heat the oil and garlic in a 10-inch heavy-duty skillet (preferably cast-iron) over medium-high heat until the garlic starts to sizzle steadily and browns in places, about 2 minutes. Add the spinach, sprinkle with ¼ tsp. each salt and pepper, and cook, tossing, until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Transfer the spinach to a colander. Let cool a couple of minutes, discard the garlic, and gently squeeze out the excess liquid from the spinach.

In a medium bowl, toss the spinach with the fontina, parmigiano, sun-dried tomatoes, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Set 3 of the pita halves on a work space and top each with 2 slices of the prosciutto. Top each evenly with the spinach mixture and set the remaining 3 pita halves on top.

Wipe the skillet clean with a paper towel and heat the pan over medium heat. When the pan is hot, add one of the pita sandwiches and set another medium heavy skillet on top of the sandwich. Put 2 lb. of weights (cans work well) in the empty skillet and cook the sandwich until the bottom starts to brown, about 2 minutes. Flip and cook the other side until it browns and the cheese starts to melt out the sides, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a baking sheet and keep warm in the oven. Cook the remaining sandwiches in the same manner. Cut the sandwiches in wedges and serve.

Tip: You can also cook these sandwiches on a panini press or over a very low flame on a covered gas or charcoal grill.

Linguine with Zucchini, Pancetta & Parmigiano

Serves four.

Kosher salt
¼ lb. thinly sliced pancetta, cut in ½-inch squares
Olive or vegetable oil, if needed
1 medium red onion, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced crosswise
Freshly ground black pepper
2 small zucchini, cut into thin half moons
1 medium radicchio (about ½ lb.), quartered, cored, and sliced crosswise ½ inch thick
½ cup lower-salt chicken broth
2 Tbs. chopped fresh mint
1 lb. dried linguine
¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 tsp. balsamic vinegar; more to taste

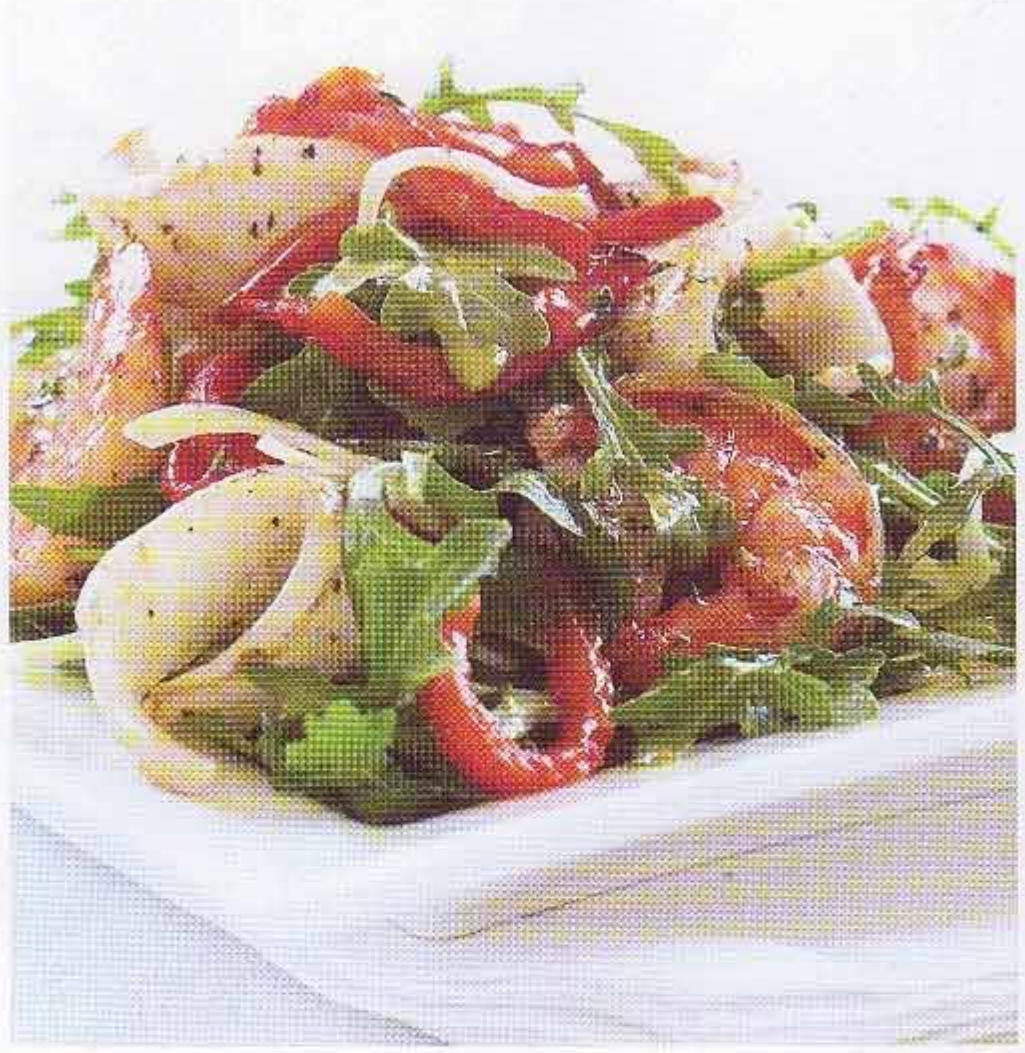
Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil.

Meanwhile, cook the pancetta in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat until golden, 4 to 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the pancetta to a small paper-towel-lined plate. Pour the pancetta fat into a small dish and measure 1 Tbs. of it back into the pan (if there's not enough, add olive or vegetable oil to make up the difference).

Return the skillet to medium heat. Add the onion to the pan, sprinkle with ¼ tsp. each salt and pepper, and cook, stirring frequently, until the onion starts to soften and wilt, about 4 minutes. Add the zucchini, sprinkle with ¼ tsp. salt and cook, stirring, until it starts to soften, about 3 minutes. Stir in the radicchio, broth, and mint and remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, cook the linguine in the boiling water according to package directions until it's barely tender. Reserve about ½ cup of the pasta water and then drain the pasta well. Return the pasta to its pot and add ½ cup of the parmigiano, the zucchini mixture, the balsamic vinegar, and ¼ cup of the pasta water. Cook, stirring, over medium-high heat, until the pasta is tender and has picked up the flavors of the sauce, about 1 minute. Add more of the pasta water if the mixture becomes dry. Stir in the pancetta and season to taste with more vinegar, salt, and pepper. Serve sprinkled with the remaining ¼ cup parmigiano.

Photos: Scott Phillips



Chicken Piccata

Serves four.

8 boneless, skinless, thin-cut (¼ to ½ inch thick) chicken breast cutlets, (about 1½ lb.)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 to 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed
3 Tbs. capers, rinsed and chopped
2 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced
¾ cup lower-salt chicken broth
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more as needed
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 Tbs. unsalted butter

Season the chicken with 1 tsp. salt and ½ tsp. pepper. Heat 1 Tbs. of the oil in a 12-inch heavy-duty skillet over medium-high heat. When hot, add as many cutlets as will fit in a single layer and cook until lightly browned on both sides and just cooked through, 1 to 3 minutes per side. Shingle the chicken on a platter and tent with foil. Repeat with the remaining chicken, adding another tablespoon of oil between batches if the pan seems dry.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the capers, garlic, and the remaining 1 Tbs. oil to the pan. Cook, stirring, until the garlic softens and becomes fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the chicken broth and lemon juice, raise the heat to high, and cook, stirring, until the mixture reduces by about half, 3 to 4 minutes. Off the heat, swirl in half of the parsley and the butter and season with more lemon juice, salt, and pepper to taste. Drizzle the sauce over the chicken breasts, sprinkle with the remaining parsley, and serve immediately.

Grilled Shrimp & Calamari Salad with Arugula & Orange Vinaigrette

Serves four.

1 medium orange
¼ cup plus 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
2 tsp. white-wine vinegar
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ lb. (4 to 6) cleaned calamari bodies (no tentacles), rinsed and patted dry
16 jumbo shrimp (21 to 25 per lb.), peeled, deveined, rinsed, and patted dry
1 red bell pepper, quartered lengthwise and cored
1 medium fennel bulb (about 1 lb.), trimmed, quartered, cored, and thinly sliced crosswise
5 oz. baby arugula (about 5 cups)

Prepare a medium-high gas or charcoal grill fire.

Finely grate 1 tsp. of zest from the orange and then squeeze ⅓ cup juice. In a small bowl, whisk the juice and zest with ¼ cup of the oil, 1 tsp. of the thyme, the vinegar, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper.

Using a sharp pairing knife, cut open the calamari bodies lengthwise and lightly score both sides in a crosshatch pattern. Put them in a medium bowl with the shrimp and red pepper and toss with the remaining 2 Tbs. oil, 1 tsp. thyme, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Thread the shrimp on 3 or 4 metal skewers.

Grill the shrimp and peppers (skin side up), covered, until they have good grill marks, 2 to 3 minutes. Flip both and continue to grill until the shrimp are just firm and opaque, about 2 minutes more. Move the shrimp to a clean plate and let the peppers continue to cook until they're soft and the skin is charred, about 5 minutes more. Meanwhile, grill the calamari until barely cooked through, about 1 minute per side. When the calamari and peppers are done, move them to the plate with the shrimp.

Cut the calamari into quarters lengthwise and remove the shrimp from the skewers. Peel and thinly slice the red peppers. In a large bowl, toss the fennel and arugula with half of the vinaigrette. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Distribute the greens on 4 plates and top with the shrimp, calamari, and red peppers. Drizzle with some of the remaining vinaigrette and serve.

Tip: If you don't like calamari, you can substitute extra shrimp.

Orecchiette with Fennel, Sausage & Tomatoes

Serves four.

Kosher salt
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
¾ lb. sweet Italian sausage, casing removed
1 large fennel bulb (about 1¼ lb.), quartered, cored, and finely chopped
¾ cup dry white wine
2 cups fresh (or canned) seeded diced tomatoes, drained if using canned
12 basil leaves, torn into small pieces
⅛ to ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
Freshly ground black pepper
¾ lb. dried orecchiette
½ cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano

Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil.

Heat 1½ Tbs. of the oil in a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan over medium-high heat until shimmering hot. Add the sausage and cook, breaking it up with a metal spoon, until browned and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Transfer the sausage to a paper-towel-lined plate and pour off and discard any fat left in the pan.

Set the pan over medium heat and add the remaining 1½ Tbs. oil, the fennel, and 1 tsp. salt. Cook, stirring, until the fennel softens and browns lightly, about 6 minutes. Raise the heat to high, add the wine, and cook, scraping the bottom of the pan to loosen any browned bits, until almost evaporated, 1 to 2 minutes.

Add the sausage, tomatoes, half of the basil, the red pepper flakes, and ½ tsp. each salt and pepper. Lower the heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes break down, 6 to 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the orecchiette in the boiling water, stirring frequently until just tender, about 11 minutes. Reserve ½ cup of the cooking water and drain well. Return the pasta to the pot, add the sauce, and cook over medium-high heat, stirring, for 1 minute so the sauce and pasta meld. If the pasta seems dry, add enough cooking water to moisten it to your liking. Stir in half of the pecorino, season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve sprinkled with the remaining pecorino and basil.

Grilled Prosciutto-Wrapped Chicken Stuffed with Fresh Mozzarella & Basil

Serves four.

4 medium boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 1½ lb.)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
12 large basil leaves
¼ lb. fresh mozzarella, thinly sliced
4 thin slices prosciutto (preferably imported)
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Prepare a medium charcoal fire or light a gas grill to medium high.

Meanwhile, prepare the chicken breasts. Cut through each one horizontally almost all the way through and open it like a book. Sprinkle the chicken all over with ½ tsp. each salt and pepper. Layer the basil and mozzarella evenly on half of each breast and then fold it closed. Wrap a slice of prosciutto around each breast to hold it closed and then brush lightly on both sides with the olive oil.

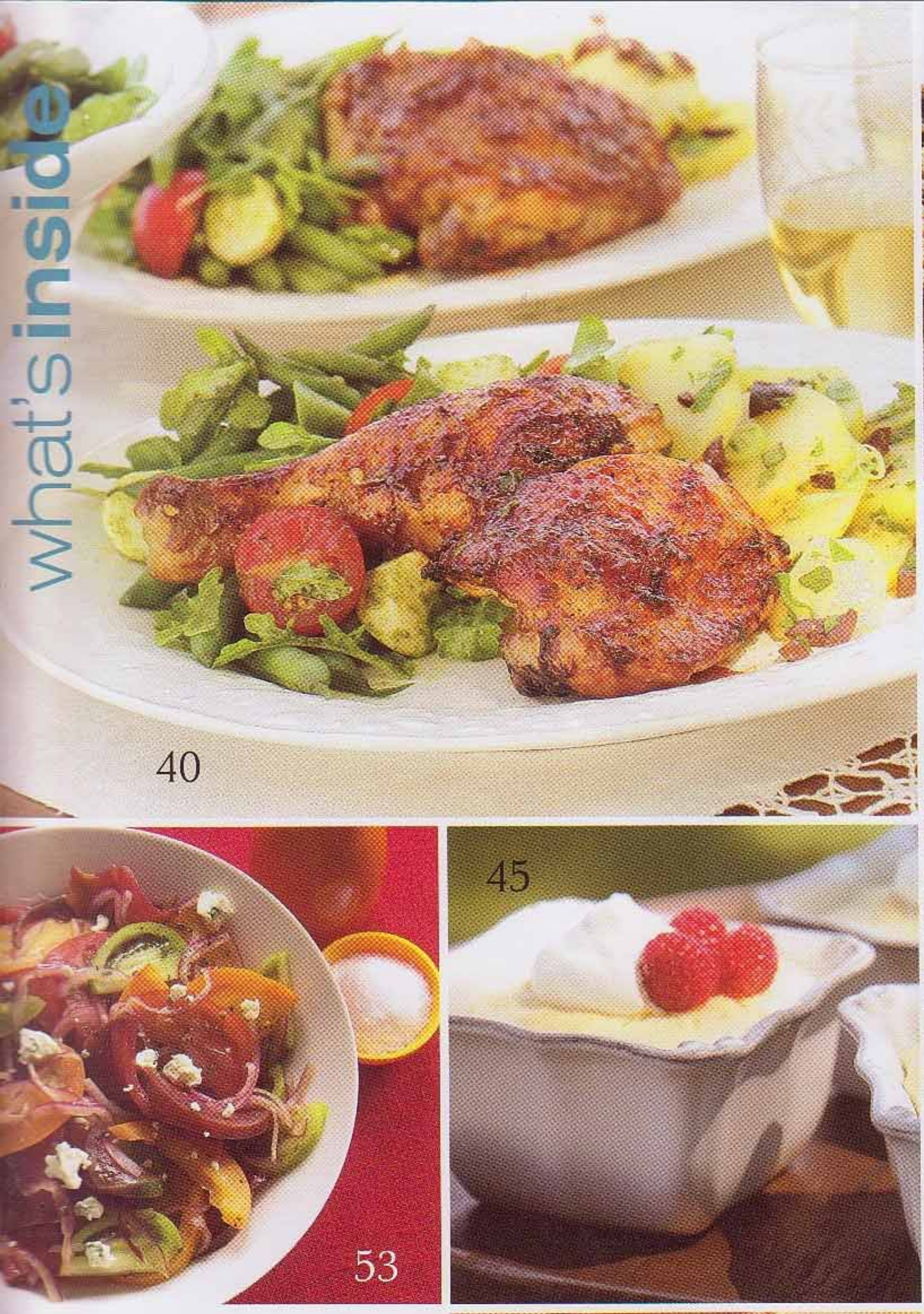
Reduce the heat on the gas grill to medium. Grill the chicken breasts, covered, until they are well marked, about 4 minutes. Flip and cook, turning every few minutes, until the chicken is just firm to the touch and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the breast registers 165°F, 10 to 12 minutes more. Let cool for a couple of minutes and then serve.

Note: Make sure your prosciutto pieces are long and full enough to wrap all the way around the chicken breasts.

Tony Rosenfeld is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. *He is the author of* 150 Things to Make with Roast Chicken. ◆

t Phillips

what's inside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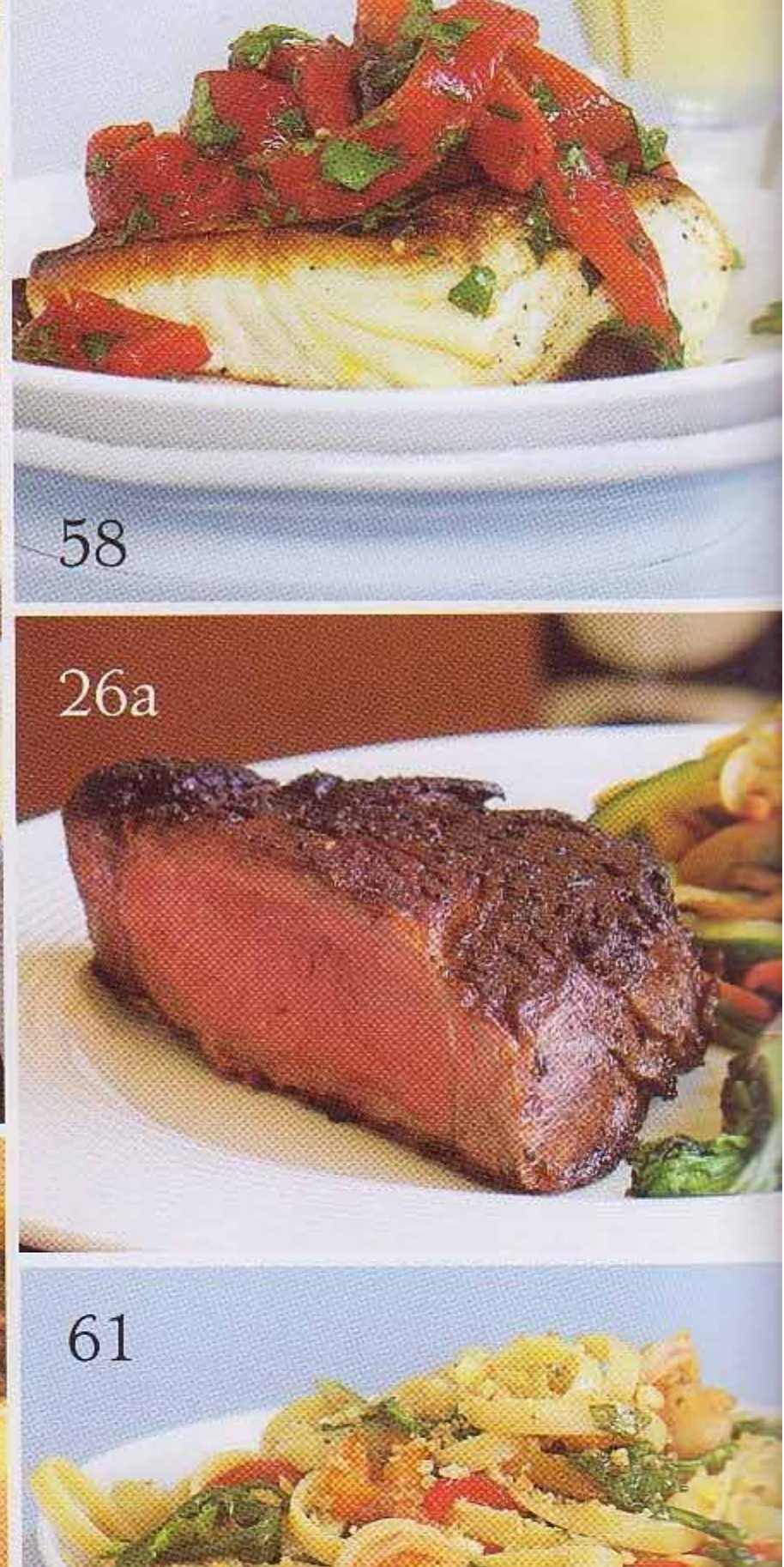
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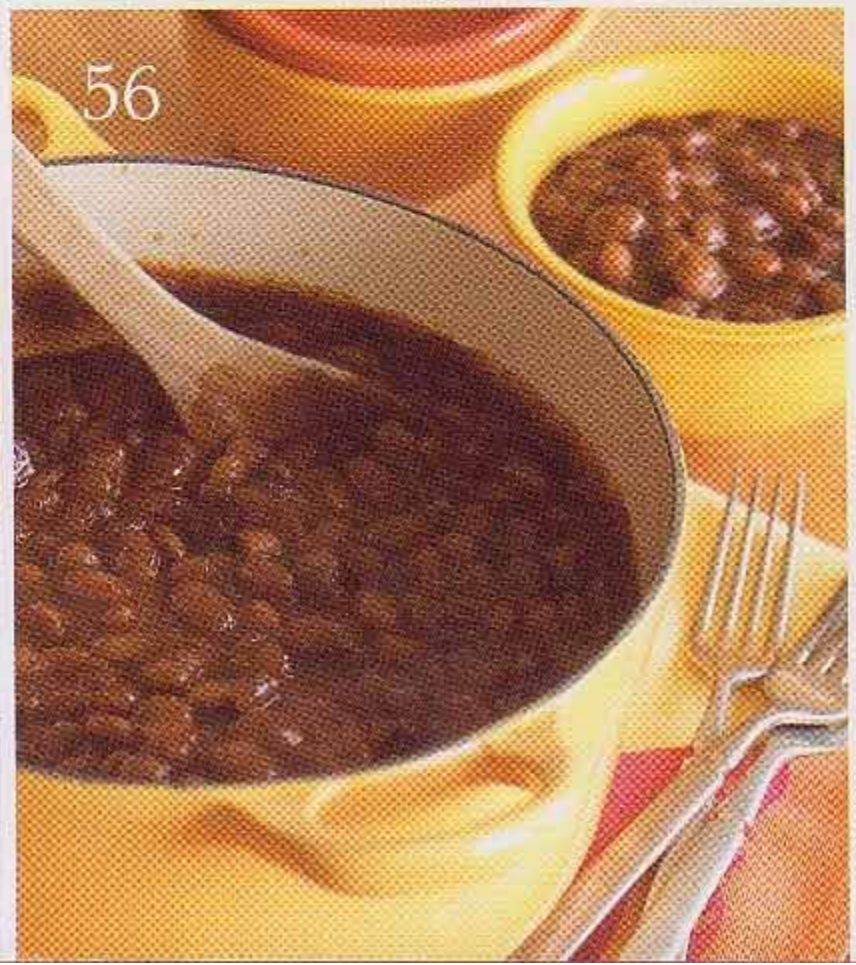
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